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PAUL GAUGUIN



PAUL GAUGUIN — SELF PORTRAIT

BY BERIL BECKER

PAUL
GAUGUIN

The Calm Madman.



NEW YORK
TUDOR PUBLISHING CO.

1935

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MANUFACTURED IN THE U. S. A.

TO RUSSE
WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE

*

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S T O

ANGEL FLORES, for advice and criticism.

PATRICK RAFFERTY, for his first-hand account
of the South Seas in 1902-03.

JEAN DORSENNE, whose publication of the letters of Paul Gauguin to his wife in *La Vie Sentimentale de Paul Gauguin*, revealed to the world, for the first time, what a pathetically misunderstood man that great artist really was.

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PAUL
GAUGUIN

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CHAPTER I

THE LAST LIQUIDATION

THE SEINE was overflowing. Brown waters roared ominously seven meters above the tide-gauge under the Pont Royal. Gambetta had been interred under the rain and Prince Jerome-Napoleon pasted deceitful posters on the walls of Paris promising a monarchic Utopia . . . Ministerial crisis in Spain. Restlessness in Italy. France and England uglily discussing the future of Egypt. Disastrous inundations in Austria.

All these accidents and misfortunes were feverishly registered by the sensitive computator of Paris — the Bourse — in January, 1883.

A stocky broad-shouldered man of middle height with a reddish, drooping mustache and a tufted beard walks across the Place de la Bourse, his stride so aggressive as to thrust aside a man in his headlong course. He pushes in the door of "Bertin and Company" at 6 Rue Lafitte with unnecessary violence. To the right, printed in letters of gold on the frosted panel of an office door, is the name

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Liquidateur

Gauguin enters his office, throws his portfolio on the table, his coat and hat on the rack, and slumps down in his

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chair deeply exhausted. Another day, another bankruptcy, another taking of inventory — the cold, formal, mathematical routine of business. God, will there be no end?

A thin hawk-nosed clerk enters Gauguin's office and apologetically stretches out his paper.

"That Redingot business, Monsieur Gauguin, are you ready?"

"No. No. Not today."

Gauguin almost hurls the words at him. The clerk shrugs his shoulders, spreads his fingers in a conciliatory manner, and walks out leaving the door open behind him. Gauguin springs from his chair and shuts the door with a bang that knocks the calendar from the wall. He removes his jacket and puts on another coat of black and shiny silk — the official garb of a liquidateur. Gauguin smiles at himself. He feels ashamed of himself in his shiny coat. Better to be a pig, for only a human being can be ridiculous! He takes a paper from his portfolio, he settles down to examine it. The figures blur before his eyes. Nervously he lights a cigarette and attempts to concentrate again on the balance-sheet outlining the assets and liabilities of "Pierret and Company."

Invested Assets — Cash on Hand — Cash in Banks — Notes Receivable — Accounts Receivable — Mortgages — Notes Payable — Accounts Payable — Accrued Liabilities. . . .

Smooth, round-faced Monsieur Noyer, the liquidateur in the adjacent office, smoking his cigar complacently, enters with a cheery: "How are you, Paul?"

Gauguin does not even look up, but Monsieur Noyer is accustomed to his surly neighbour.

"The market is still groggy. This Rothschild and Crédit Foncier merger didn't seem to do much good."

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Gauguin taps his foot.

"It's bound to go down still further, take my word. All these inundations over Europe, not to mention a ministerial crisis in Spain, the Italian agitation, this squabble with England over Egypt... Believe me, *Suez* and *Banque Franco-Egyptienne* are due for a slump. You know, Paul, the deeper I go into the study of finance the more certain I am that if the Kaiser has fleas and he has to scratch himself, or if an English Lord gets into a temper because he breaks his monocle, the Bourse is the first to feel it."

Monsieur Noyer's gushing eloquence drones in Gauguin's ears like a vexatious bumble bee. He turns to Noyer and says ironically:

"Yes, *we* financiers have our fingers on the pulse of the world..."

"That's just it, Paul, and it's a pretty sick world — but sick as it is, it's never a corpse. That's the game of finance. Wreck it till it's almost a corpse. Buy it up, and cash in on its recovery."

The simile sickens Gauguin.

"The world's a corpse and a rotting one, and men with money are vultures fattening on it."

Monsieur Noyer nods sympathetically.

"Yes, it's pretty bad! But cheer up, there's always something worse ahead of us. What do you say to a little party at *la Galette*? Some of the boys are arranging it for next Saturday. Nothing like a wild party to put an edge on you."

Monsieur Noyer knows that Gauguin is good company after a few drinks. He is anxious to enlist him.

"I am in no mood for parties, Noyer. Can't you see I'm busy?"

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Gauguin poises an inkwell on his palm, itching to fling it.

"All right! Have it your way. It was only a polite invitation."

And Monsieur Noyer walks out with a gesture of indifference, his optimism unruffled by "the grouch."

Gauguin is suffocating. He opens the window. The roar of the Bourse around the corner bursts on him like a tidal wave. He grips the shelf of the window to steady his shrieking nerves. A madhouse this Bourse! Bankers and brokers, throwing up their arms, climbing on top of each other in a frenzy to fling their scraps of paper, yelling at the top of their voices, "Parangon, buy 121." "Sell Parangon 122.50." "Buy Dupres 80.25." "Sell Dupres 77.25." "Buy Bauchaumont 5.25." "Sell Bauchaumont 5.75." Buy sell. Sell buy. BUY SELL BUYSSELLBUYSSELLBUY.... A raucous menagerie—fighting, scrambled monkeys in a hysteria of fright—chaotic turbulence.

"I must quit! I can't stand this any longer!"

To that tortured soul the implacable routine of business looms like a nightmare recalling the days when he was a student in a Jesuit school in Orléans. Black-cowled priests marched him into the class-room to the beat of drums. The pale, cowering students spoke only to their intimate friends for fear of student spies who would report every jesting blasphemy. The guilty were taken to the dark punishment-room and the devil was flogged out of them for the salvation of their souls.

It was this deadly office, this faded carpet, this silly picture of Monsieur Bertin, this scratched mahogany desk, this dusty window at his right, this monotonous sameness day

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after day, year in and year out, that piled agony on agony on a man descended from the Borgias; whose great-uncle was the Viceroy of Peru; whose very grandmother, Flora Tristan, despised money and spent it freely travelling up and down France to help Proudhon and Leblanc create Trade Unionism for the oppressed workers.

Here he was a sad-eyed gentleman of thirty-five in a neatly pressed suit, an immaculate white shirt, a black cravat — the picture of respectability and decorum. The devil! It wasn't his fault that he was shoved into the world of business. For five years, from the age of seventeen, his clear blue eyes drank in the ice floes of Greenland, the flaming tropic skies, the deliquescent spires of pagodas at twilight. At twenty-three he stamped on terra firma. He thrust his hands into empty pockets. A few months before, while in India, he had received the news of his mother's death. He now found himself alone in Paris, but for Gustave Arosa, who had been an old friend of his mother's and a tutor of his youth. Monsieur Arosa spoke with his friend the banker, Monsieur Galzado. Monsieur Galzado spoke with his friend Monsieur Bertin, who made place for an extra clerk. The gates closed behind Marie Gauguin's son. A clerk. An assistant. A liquidateur. A husband. A father of one, two, three, four, five children.

How had he ever allowed himself to acquiesce to this yoke of business, of a wife, of children — he, a rough sailor at heart? How little he knew himself, and now the demon within him found its mighty voice, and was screaming for release. Thirty-five years old. He had procrastinated long enough. He must strike — now or never!

Pissarro, his friend for years, had already shown him the

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path of an artist: that path which invariably wrestled against the bondage of family, of society, and led one to recoil into oneself, to watch the visions of an inner world — Pissarro the wise and appreciative Jew — bald-headed, white-bearded Abraham, whose life was a violent hymn of colors...

Gauguin once more grapples with the problem. Pierret and Company: Invested Assets — Accounts Receivable — Mortgages — Notes Payable — Accounts Payable — Accrued Liabilities, tantalizing francs refusing to fall in the order that will give him his thirty thousand francs a year — the formula for respectability, esteem, comfort, success. He shoves the paper aside with a last decisive gesture.

"I'm through!"

He strides, fearful of looking back, and enters the office of his chief, Monsieur Bertin, without knocking.

*

GAUGUIN SEATS himself opposite Monsieur Bertin in silence. Bertin has a flaccid face with soft lines around his mouth. Born to follow his father as head of the banking institution, protected all his life, he exudes the easy affability of a man who never struggled for a living. Thinking Gauguin has come to see him on the Pierret case, he merely nods his head, and continues writing for a minute or so.

"What are the total assets for Pierret?"

Gauguin answers methodically: "Not more than thirty thousand francs."

"Only thirty thousand? That's too bad! I thought we'd make five thousand out of it."

Gauguin hesitates. How tell a man for whom he has worked for eleven years that he is going to leave him forever? He must wait. Marking time he says:

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"Pierret knows how to conceal his assets."

"But not his liabilities!"

Bertin laughs at his sally. Gauguin's grimness does not relax.

"I have something on my mind. For a long time."

Monsieur Bertin is jovial.

"Well, well, what's the surprise?"

"I have been concealing something from you. I'm fed up with business."

Monsieur Bertin is not effaced.

"So am I, so are we all. But what can we do about it?"

"You are satisfied to do nothing about it. As for me—I have decided to follow my vocation, painting."

"My dear Gauguin, what you probably need is a good rest. Why don't you go down South for a couple of weeks? It would do you a lot of good, and you'll make up your work in a few days. After all—"

"You don't understand, Monsieur Bertin. I detest this kind of work. I have decided to quit and devote all my time to painting."

Monsieur Bertin sits up, jolted out of his complacency. He taps the table with his pince-nez case, eyeing Gauguin as if to solve the mystery of this new man before him.

"Listen to me, Paul! You have been with me ten, eleven years. I have nothing to complain of, nor you either. I know you are a capable man, but there are times when every one of us, I don't care who it is, gets a little crazy."

Gauguin's grimness relaxes into a smile. At last he has committed himself. The worst is over. He can afford to let Monsieur Bertin know his stature as an artist.

"I'm afraid you don't know me outside of business. I am a business man by accident. I am an artist by heart. I wanted

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to quit a long time ago. This is not a temporary obsession. I am thirty-five now. I cannot afford to wait any longer. That is all!"

Gauguin rises from his chair.

"Sit down! Sit down! You can't leave me with a dozen words. I've never heard anything like it! A man works himself up to thirty thousand francs a year. He has a wife and children, and suddenly he decides to chuck it all to paint pictures in a garret. You're a hard-headed business man. This is preposterous! Think it over, Gauguin."

Gauguin tightens his fist.

"My mind is made up. Business is poisoning my life."

"Poisoning! You're not yourself, Paul. It's all right to spend your Sundays at painting, but whoever heard of a man of thirty-five quitting business to fool around with a brush! Of course if you were a millionaire..."

"Damn the millions! I have enough to pull the family through a year. After that I expect to make as much out of painting as I do here."

"Come, come, you know as well as I that even a genius makes his money after he is dead. This isn't a practical joke, is it, Paul?"

Gauguin rises proudly.

"It might surprise you to know that Huysmans considers me the most promising painter today."

"Good for you—but what of it? It won't feed your wife and children!"

These practical minded business men! He might as well speak to a stone wall. How put this smug money-grubber in his place? How show him his pettiness? Gauguin was almost choking with rage.

"You know very little about art, Monsieur Bertin. All

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that impresses *you* is money. You don't seem to realize that the greatest treasure in Paris is the Louvre and not the Bourse."

"You're talking like a child spouting a graduation speech. The work of the world has to go on. It's a man's job!"

"A man's job. Bah, that's only an hypocrisy! You all talk as if work were the end of life — the only honourable thing to do. Work in itself is vulgar. Down in your hearts you envy the millionaire loafer. To create: that's life. Everything else is slavery. Your only ambition is to retire some day to putter with flowers and hunt rabbits. You just haven't the guts or the talent to escape."

Monsieur Bertin cannot understand. He feels almost glad this maniac is leaving his business. He thinks to himself, 'it just shows you how you can't trust people.' Aloud he says:

"Escape? Where does one escape to?"

"There are artists painting in garrets, sailors beachcombing the isles of the Pacific, explorers penetrating the jungles of Africa. Every day is an adventure. They know that life can be mysterious and beautiful. It is this comfort, this security, this dull round of business, no day different from the next — this fawning for money that is really a sordid affair."

Gauguin is relieved. The rancor within him is now, at last, out of his system.

Monsieur Bertin is feeling uncomfortable. He is not accustomed to so much emotion. He laughs derisively.

"You're a clever man, Monsieur Gauguin. Apparently it is best that you quit business. You are really too clever

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for us. I only trust that your superiority won't lead you to the poorhouse or — the insane asylum."

Gauguin bows stiffly and walks out.

Monsieur Bertin sinks in his chair. Somehow the well-ordered world, neatly tabulated in figures, the sense of achievement and power, all this satisfaction with himself and with life is slightly shaken, as if an earthquake had rocked for a fraction of a second the pillars of his eminent respectability. But all he says to himself is:

"That God damn fool!"

CHAPTER II

A MINISTER'S DAUGHTER

THAT NIGHT Madame Gauguin did not keep the supper waiting. She knew that her husband was sometimes delayed in business. She gave the children their food and sent them to bed. But she was uneasy. Paul always told her in the morning when he would be late for supper. But he was not himself lately. Nervous! Taciturn! What could he be thinking of?

She turned the wick of the oil lamp to brighten the flame. The shadows were too depressing. She picked up a book by Zola, but could not absorb herself in it. Her ears were too alert for the click of a key in the front door. She laid down the book, her heart a prey to foreboding thoughts.

How different it was ten years ago—it all seemed so remote and unreal—when she first met him. She had just arrived from Copenhagen, as chaperon to Marie Heegard, who was to spend a year in Paris to perfect her French. They were seated in a restaurant near the Bourse, laughing so ingenuously as they spoke Danish to each other. Suddenly Marie pulled her sleeve. At the door stood a young man staring at her in a moonstruck fashion. She was beautiful—and she knew it. She was accustomed to the admiring stares of the wasp-coated, anemic Frenchmen. She was a Brun-

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hilde with golden, reddish hair, her classic face a healthy glow of pink and white, a physical vigour emanating from her luminous eyes or perhaps from the mannish cut of her neat, blue jacket—a tantalizing contrast to the soft pink bodice that melted into the snow of her firm throat. A rare budding rose from the North amidst the powdered, skinny, artificial coquettes of Paris.

She stared back frankly at the rude stranger—a young man with peculiar curved eyes and powerful square shoulders. He was bronzed like one who had recently returned from a wind-swept sea. His eyes were light and green, but they were so big they looked dark.

She lowered her eyes before his intense stare. It was not the bold, inviting glance of a young roué playing his game of amour with a pretty girl. In his eyes there seemed to stir a deeper passion as if he were sated with sensuality, as if he longed for pure love. A longing for one who could be a companion to him, a mother to his children—a longing for a home where he could retire after the day's work without the oppressive sense of loneliness that drove him to dance halls, bistros, and houses of assignation. It was with the fatality of instinct that he passed two empty tables to sit down at hers.

She felt so abashed she dared not speak to Marie for fear of revealing the fluttering of her heart. When she needed the sugar bowl, he anticipated her desire, for he passed it to her with a smile and boldly launched a question.

"You're a stranger in Paris, Mademoiselle?"

She felt a tense pleasure in speaking to that courteous young man whose skeptical eyes were so fascinating.

"No. I have been in Paris before. I've taken several trips from Copenhagen."

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"Copenhagen? Oh, I know that place. I spent four months there during the war. I was a sailor and we were tied up there. Had I met a girl like you there, I wouldn't have minded if the war lasted until Doomsday!"

She laughed gaily, "Nonsense, there are lots of nice girls in Copenhagen."

"Yes, but nice girls don't care to meet sailors. But don't be afraid, I'm a great financier now. You can meet me and still be nice."

By the time they were finishing their entrée, he had learned that she was a governess and that her name was Mette Sophie Gad, while she had heard the name of Paul Gauguin for the first time. When they finished their dessert he had written her address and placed an exclamation mark beside it. He paid the bill, left a munificent tip, and as a final stroke, urged the girls to see the big hit of the season, "La Fille de Madame Angot," that very night. But Mette couldn't allow herself to be swept off her feet by an impetuous young man and felt it was the respectable thing to refuse. But she found him more sober than she suspected and her drawing room became for him a steady substitute for the light amusements of the Boulevard de Clichy.

Her father was a Lutheran Minister and her family was composed of dignified functionaries in the Danish government. When she announced her engagement to them, they were highly pleased to learn that her fiancé was a young stock broker who knew the value of money and who, without doubt, was destined to make a great deal of it.

And then on the 22nd of November, 1873 — dates have a way of being dramatic — there were two solemn ceremonies, first at the city hall of the ninth arrondissement,

and then, at her insistence, in a Lutheran Church at Rue Chauchat.

The honeymoon fulfilled all her anticipations. The cool reserve of a blonde Viking inflamed the man from the South the more. He called her "the pearl of Denmark." She felt herself blessed with all the good things of life and when a son was born, she saw a life of prosperous tranquillity stretching forever before her. How peacefully the years glided by. Only the table seemed to change as it was enlarged for Clovis, Emile, Aline, Jean and Paul. The business at Bertin's had something of the eternal in its clock-like precision. France was making a remarkable recovery from its war with Prussia and every speculation of her husband succeeded. Business was booming. There came a year when he made forty thousand francs. Another ten years and she saw herself the wife of a millionaire banker, with a château on the Loire.

Her husband was very clever. She never met a man with so much energy and versatility. Everything interested him. He could play the mandolin, sing ballads, model in clay, decorate the house, and draw with almost a professional accuracy. How delighted he was when he first put pencil to paper at the age of twenty-five, and drew the face of Emile, their first born. But there was one disturbing factor that she noted at the beginning and which she felt more and more powerless to remedy. It was his inability to choose friends. He seemed to devote himself exclusively to impecunious artists! He never invited his business colleagues to his home — and success in the financial world depended so much on the proper social contacts.

Sometimes he would drag her to the residence of Gustave

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Arosa, for whom he had a sentimental attachment as the tutor of his youth, to see his latest purchase in paintings. The paintings were so crude; the colors so violent!

"Now, Mette, tell the truth — don't you get tired to death of seeing those miles of brownish, academic paintings in the Louvre? Here is something different. They are blazing in strange, new colors. They live!"

She never could understand his enthusiasms — just like a child. One should take life more reasonably when one gets older, and not invite to one's home such crack-brained patriarchs as Pissarro on Sundays. Of course, he was a compatriot and she could amuse herself by speaking Danish to him. But he was always talking like a prophet announcing the dawn of a new art.

And the phrases he used! The days of the Commune were being lived again in the ateliers of Montmartre. The institution of the Ecole des Beaux Arts must be overthrown. One should read scientific treatises on color to bring more light to the darkness of academic painting. It wasn't necessary to spend four years learning to draw. Only originality was important. The thing to do was to paint alone. Instinct would guide one to a new beauty.

Paul became more surly, more absorbed in himself. He stopped playing dominoes and cards and he was reluctant to see plays, which he called machine-made. His only joy seemed to be to paint away his Sundays, his hair in disarray, his smock smeared with colors, his hands daubed in paint. There was one Sunday he would not leave his room to meet some of her guests. She had to apologize for him. He had a headache. But she could not cover him with excuses much longer. Soon he was never at home. He spent

the evenings sketching at the Calorossi atelier, a training ground for radical artists.

She accompanied him there one night. In the dim flare of gas jets, paper before him, pencil poised, he would wait hawk-like for the model to disrobe at seven sharp and shift into five-minute poses. The way he slashed the pencil across the paper! It was pretty but it wasn't worth all that pain. Around them were boisterous youths, giggling girls, garrulous old men. It was shameful for her husband, almost thirty years old, a responsible business man, to be in that riff-raff of vagabonds and Bohemians.

She had no right to protest, which made it all the more difficult. He was supporting the family almost in luxury. There was even enough money left to buy all sorts of paintings. He would mention such names as Renoir, Monet, Cézanne with more respect than Boulanger or Gambetta. What was worse he paid fifteen thousand francs to decorate the house with their paintings.

She remembered the year he first exhibited. The official salon would have nothing to do with him or his friends, so they made use of an empty store and called it the Salon des Independents. How proudly he came home that night.

"Do you know what Manet said of my painting? 'A good piece of work, Gauguin.' I thought he was flattering me because I bought one of his paintings and I said, 'I'm only an amateur.' 'But no,' he said, 'in painting there are no amateurs. There are only good artists and bad artists.' Imagine — from the greatest painter living today!"

She became more and more disturbed. It was true the income did not decrease, but others were enriching themselves while her husband invested all the extra money in

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paintings instead of stocks and bonds with guaranteed dividends. Worse still, he was spending his evenings in a stuffy, smoky, disreputable café till the early hours of the morning, getting his head full of alcohol, and boasting the next morning that he was creating a reputation for himself. Why shouldn't those vagabonds respect him? He was not only as good a painter as they were, he paid for their drinks as well. And then to bring those patchy, bearded, insolent rebels home to scare the baby into a crying fit, to throw cigar ashes on the carpet, and to scratch the furniture with their feet as if private property never existed!

And then the day he stamped in with a magazine in his hand. "You think I'm wasting my time, making a fool of myself with my painting? Well, what do you think of this?" It was an article by Huysmans on the exhibition of 1881. "I do not hesitate to affirm that among the contemporary painters who work at the nude none has yet struck so vivid a note of reality. I didn't make a Venus out of her. Flat breasts. Big stomach. The truth!" Then, for the first time, he expressed his innermost desire: "What heights I could reach if I painted every day."

Fortunately he loved the children. Heaven knows where his madness would lead him, if it weren't for them. And yet after doing some delightful drawings of their heads he would say:

"One sacrifices for one's children, and their children sacrifice for their children, and this stupidity seems to go on forever. If everybody sacrificed, who would create the arts and the beauty of life?"

What frightful mania was possessing him? It was getting terribly serious. It was but a month before that they had their first serious quarrel. She said to him:

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"Paul, I've invited the Couves for dinner. It is a great honor. Monsieur Couve's brother is one of the most important men in the Bourse."

"I'm painting all day."

"But I've invited him. You can't neglect your business friends. They might feel hurt."

"Money means nothing to me. Besides, all bankers are bores."

She had to get into hysterics to put some sense into his head. But the dinner was a failure. Paul was taciturn. He behaved like a sullen child. The Couves left early.

What could she do with him? When they were married she never even suspected he had any taste for art. Of course, it was flattering to have his name mentioned in art magazines and to have her friends see his paintings at exhibitions. But how much more convenient it would be if Paul would create a similar reputation in the world of finance. She was so sure he would. She was so sure he could, if it weren't for his cursed mania for art.

She felt the situation was coming to a head. One day he would say, "I've overheard Schuffenecker say, 'If that Gauguin painted every day, he would be the greatest of us all.'" Another day it was, "What a day to paint in the Tuileries. Time flies and I am getting nowhere." Always a hint!

She had heard he was alienating all his friends at Bertin's by his open disgust for business. He was throwing around bombshells to the effect that millionaires were only greater scoundrels than himself—that anyone can get rich who cares to fatten on bleeding lambs—and that a business man inexorably becomes a wolf. He was a wolf himself, in

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his energy and his mental superiority, but he was a tender wolf. He had told her it sickened him to see a bleeding lamb.

It was only the other day that he almost flung a magazine at her.

"Read this!"

She read the disheartening words of Huysmans, "Alas, Gauguin is not progressing."

He seemed to look accusingly at her.

"It's business that's poisoning my art career."

But he couldn't be mad enough to quit business. He loved the children too well! It was true they had about eight thousand francs in the Crédit Lyonnais and the collection of paintings would bring as much, but that would last the family only a year or two. It was impossible for him to quit. Wasn't there a cure for that obsession of his? He had a way of swinging from enthusiasm to despair. Suppose in a moment of overconfidence he did something rash?

She heard the click of the key in the lock. She rose with a sickening feeling in the pit of her stomach. She used to greet him so eagerly. Now she was frightened every time he came home. Anxiously she met him in the hallway and helped him take his coat off.

"You look tired, Paul. Did you have a hard day?" They kissed each other. Paul hesitated.

"Are the children well?"

"Emile has had some trouble with his teacher. She hit him with a ruler and he bit her hand. You'll have to see the head master."

Gauguin smiled. Like father—like son! Mette continued:

"But you haven't the time, so it's best you write him."

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Now was the time to say it.

"I'll have time from now on, Mette."

"What do you mean?"

"I've quit Bertin's today."

Mette turned pale. So it had come at last!

"But, Paul, how could you — the children! What are we to live on?"

"I will paint every day. There is no doubt that I can sell them."

Mette realized only too well that it is useless to argue with an obsessed man.

"Did you take a year's leave of absence?"

Gauguin had a grim tautness about his face.

"No, I'm finished with Bertin's forever!"

Mette bent her head.

"It is a disaster!"

"Come, Mette! You are strong. You must have confidence in me."

She could only reply tonelessly, "It is a disaster!"

The immobility of her face frightened Gauguin.

"Mette, Mette, don't take it to heart. It will all turn out well in the end. Have I ever failed you before?"

She lifted her head courageously, courage reared from the depths of despair.

"Yes — it will turn out well in the end. I will economize. No theatre, no opera. I will be careful to buy the simplest foods. We'll manage. It won't be difficult."

Gauguin saw the despair in her soul.

"Mette, it means so much to me. You want to see me happy, don't you?"

She answered in Danish, staring distractedly ahead of

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her, "Certainly, I want to see you happy, but the children—I hope they won't suffer."

Gauguin was chilled. He saw an abyss opening between Mette and himself. There was a hard note in his voice when he answered, "Hereafter I will paint every day"—

CHAPTER III

THE TRAVELLING SALESMAN

GAUGUIN IS waiting outside the office of Karl Olsen, wholesale dealer in awnings. He has been kept waiting for fifteen minutes. "Herr Olsen must be picking his teeth clean from his beefsteak dinner," thinks Gauguin. At last he is ushered in. Herr Olsen leans back on his chair and glances surreptitiously at the card that Gauguin gave the office boy. Herr Olsen does not greet Gauguin. He only looks impatiently at his black valise, as if to say—"Well, what have you?" Gauguin lifts his bag.

"Not on the table!" Herr Olsen glares.

Gauguin opens his valise on the chair and lays out his samples.

"This is the most popular pattern, selling at seventy a yard. You can feel the quality for yourself."

Herr Olsen feels the cloth. He grunts his disapproval.

"This is fifty-five a yard. If you buy in orders of a thousand or more, I can give it to you at forty."

Herr Olsen examines it more carefully, but his mouth droops in utter disdain. Gauguin is trying to control his rage.

"Tell me, Herr Olsen, what's wrong with this stuff?"

"What's wrong? It's fit for a bawdy house!"

To be kept waiting and then to be insulted. The swine! There is a glass of water on the table. Gauguin dashes the

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contents at Herr Olsen's face. Herr Olsen splutters and lifts his arms to strike Gauguin, but the look in the Frenchman's eyes curbs him.

"Get out.— You — You —."

Fortunately Herr Olsen is too respectable a man to have acquired a forceful vocabulary. Gauguin leisurely replaces his samples as Herr Olsen shrinks before this calm madman.

Gauguin walks into the street — the clean, blue sky of a Danish summer day mocking his tormented mind. He hasn't the heart to try another office. The glorious sunlight invites him to loaf. He takes a carriage to the Langae Linea — the long boulevard skirting the seashore, so gay with trees, flowers and trailing vines. He seats himself on a bench facing the waves and his eyes follow the ripples.

So all his hopes have ended in the nothingness of a ripple that loses itself in sand. Was a malignant fate pursuing him, because he yearned for something higher than the struggle for existence?

Only a year before, with what zest he awoke to the Monday morning when he did not have to gulp his breakfast and hurry to the Bourse. The whole day before him to paint portraits of his children and street scenes in the Pissarro manner. Months went by and his savings were gradually diminishing at the bank. Mette tried to find work, but there was no opening except that of domestic help. Discouraged she would come back to find that her prodigal husband had been using her best linen table cloths for canvas and her finest petticoats for paint rags. This practical business man was becoming as irresponsible as a child — or, perhaps, he never was a practical business man. Perhaps his position at Bertin's did not require business initia-

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tive—only a routine of duties laid out for him day by day.

“What luck, Paul?”

His haunted face only told her too well that he could not sell a single painting.

The art dealers would have none of him. It was hard enough to sell the Impressionists who had already been painting for twenty years. Why bother with a newcomer who painted like Pissarro? However, if he would paint heart-rending sentimental pictures, like a mother weeping over her dead child or peasants kneeling at prayer at the Angelus, they could find a market for him. But Gauguin had learned his lesson from Pissarro too well. One is either a plagiarist or a revolutionist. Why commercialize his art? He might as well have remained with Bertin the rest of his life.

“Paris is too expensive. Life is cheaper at Rouen. Our money will last longer there.”

Mette almost lost patience with him.

“What money? Do you know that we have only a thousand francs in the bank?”

He felt the hot breath of his creditors upon him. They would soon sink their fangs into the tender wolf. There was nothing to do but to sell his collection of paintings. His beloved Cézannes, his Manets, his Renoirs... now disappeared in a day for a mere five thousand francs.

Bah! His own art would suffice him. But he dreaded parting with a Jongkind, a landscape and a still life by Cézanne and an interior by Pissarro. To have them go would be like having his children taken away from him.

Eight months of Rouen—dæmonic labor. A trip to

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Paris. The private office of an art dealer and again the ominous words:

"Why should I try to sell your paintings when Pissarro does so much better?"

Pissarro was becoming a sinister influence. The devil with Pissarro! He had no use for those chemists who accumulated little patches of color and called themselves Impressionists. They were trying to eternalize a second of sunshine without possessing any light in their own souls. It was all so scientific — formulas, color-theories, decomposition of light, technique, pointillism. He must get away from it,—go back to the dawn of art, when artists drew with the naïveté and the inspiration of children. Of what use was Art anyhow if it couldn't bring to the onlooker some of that ecstasy and freshness that exalt children when they look out on the world around them? Just another year, and he would find his true self. He would not have to sign his paintings. Everyone would know they were Gauguins, unique, bizarre canvases unlike those of any other painter, miles apart from Pissarro.

Another year—but there was no more money! He turned to Mette pleadingly.

"You have rich relatives in Copenhagen. Perhaps they could help me find work — say — a part time job. In a year I will surely arrive."

Mette wrote to her parents with a heavy heart. Her husband despised money, and yet to what depths he was compelled to stoop to be able to exist. Society was getting its revenge on the idealist. He knew the value of liberty but he did not know its cost in a world organized for the profit of a few. She received a cautious reply from her mother.

They could come, of course, but for appearance's sake, it would be best if Paul came as a travelling salesman.

Gauguin found an awning manufacturer in Rouen, who was only too glad to let the former business man represent him at his own expense and on a commission basis. But it was not a business man: it was an artist that tried his hand at travelling salesmanship. A proud and revolutionary artist, who had to stoop and act on familiar terms with petty tradesmen. He did not even bother writing the Rouen manufacturer. He realized only too well,—that as a business man he was a good artist.

Mette's family had greeted her as they would a survivor of a shipwreck. Gauguin was the disgraced Captain who had steered his family-ship onto the rocks of poverty. He was on probation. If he could become a breadwinner again—well and good. Otherwise, as Mette had said—it is a disaster.

Tight little Copenhagen. Trim little Copenhagen. Prudent little Copenhagen. A thrifty and courteous little city where the men lifted their hats on greeting friends or on entering stores; where the ladies wore gloves up to their elbows when making calls or going shopping; where the waxed floors were scrubbed every day and where an odd scrap of paper or a napkin awry would disgrace a housekeeper forever.

How healthy and cheerful were all the citizens with pink glowing faces from the frosty air. How proud they were of their Hussars with their handsome red coats and their silver buttons as they capered their horses through the town every afternoon for the glory of the King.

Order and tranquillity everywhere. No one was allowed to sit in the café after midnight. If, by chance, Gauguin

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found it necessary to reach his apartment later than the twelve bells pealed in the great Lutheran Church, the policeman would have to unlock the gates to his block and the concierge the gates to his apartment.

He was the constant worry of the Gad family. Mette's sister had married a member of the Danish Parliament, but there was not a government post that could be given to a Frenchman. Mette's other sister had married a popular painter, who felt insulted because Gauguin would not paint popular pictures. However, as a last resort, there was a distant cousin, a Count of the highest Danish nobility.

Gauguin was dressed in his Sunday best—a cutaway suit, a colored waistcoat, a large Ascot cravat, and a high hat of grey felt. Mette borrowed the latest hour-glass fashioned outfit from her sister. Every seam was stiffened with whalebone. A standing collar, fastened with a brooch, a small bonnet set well back on the head and tied with ribbons under the chin gave the final touch to the stern, ironclad, fashionable lady of the eighties.

They were ushered into a vast, square apartment. Above the door were two views of Venice by Turner. The family arms were carved on the furniture. They sat down on chairs upon which were red velvet cushions shaped like snail shells. A dim light filtered through the stained glass windows. Gauguin felt uncomfortable in this rigid atmosphere. The butler announced the Count, a solemn, stoop-shouldered, wax-faced old man, who greeted them with condescending politeness.

Mette was awed by all the stately and antique magnificence. She expressed her admiration to the flattered Count.

"Let me show you my music chamber."

They followed him into a walnut-panelled room where there was a collection of old masters, and an exquisite clavichord. The portrait above the clavichord, a venerably bearded ancestor of the Count, was signed — Rembrandt.

Mette exclaimed, "How magnificent!"

But Gauguin dryly remarked, "It smells of mould."

At these words the Count became perceptibly stiffer. They followed him into the Chapel where his wife and daughter were reading the Bible. Their cold greeting was petrifying. Gauguin could stand it no longer. With a summarizing gesture, he said,

"Yes, it is all one marvel of Art, but I prefer the Museum."

Mette smiled apologetically. There was a trace of a sneer on the Count's face when Gauguin shook his hands in good-bye.

Mette was furious.

"How do you expect to get on, if you are going to insult everybody?"

"What do you expect me to do? Cringe to an old foggy like that? I'd sooner kick his behind."

Paul was hopeless. Fortunately Mette received a commission to translate Zola for a Danish newspaper. To her, Zola was a man who knew life. To her husband, he was an efficient mouser after vermin — an accurate journalist of dish-washing, vice and brutality.

"Why don't you translate Loti?" Gauguin adored Loti — his nostalgia for the East, his sweet melancholy. Mette dismissed Loti as an adolescent crying for the moon.

It was not long before Gauguin was acquainted with the artists of Copenhagen. They still slaved under the romantic influence of Walter Scott and Victor Hugo.

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"Carl Block is our greatest painter," they told Gauguin. Carl Block painted huge historical canvases reeking with heavy tragic emotions.

Gauguin laughed derisively.

"He reminds me of the savants in your Museum of Modern Antiquities who are debating whether the deluge occurred in 2348 B.C. or 4719 B.C. The conceited asses!"

"But you have to admit that Thorwaldsen is the greatest of sculptors."

Thorwaldsen was the idol of Denmark. At his death he left a museum to the city of Copenhagen filled with his sensational romantic statues such as Alexander clad in armour, his hand resting on the triumphal car above which Victoria the Goddess of Conquest is hovering with extended wings. Gauguin was even more savage in his reply.

"Thorwaldsen's lions are stuffed Danish dogs. His nymphs are draped in damp linen, and, yes, gentlemen, they dance a jig — just look at their feet."

The French rebel seemed to have no sense of reverence — none whatsoever. However, they invited him to show his paintings at their art club. When Gauguin went to see the exhibit the afternoon of its opening, he found the club closed. The police had found his nudes.

He became more and more reserved and taciturn. He kept to his room. The Winter daylight of six hours gave him little time to paint. Through the long nights he fed the stove with peat and, by the light of an oil lamp, made drawings of his children. Aline's eyes poured sympathy for her poor father with his old clothes and his suffering eyes. There was a night she never forgot when he embraced her and wept silently.

The Gad family ignored him as a matter of course.

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How else treat a thirty-seven-year-old man who couldn't earn a cent and who was obliged to live on their charity? How their cold, proud stares made him wince. He dreaded the Sunday dinners, when they all assembled, chattering happily, answering his remarks with a monosyllable or a chilling silence. A man who couldn't earn a living couldn't possibly make a sensible remark.

Bah! He must not let self-pity get the best of him. He must be proud and answer contempt with insolence.

Mette seemed to blossom in the cold radiant atmosphere of her native city. She taught French to some young Danish diplomats, laughing happily at their gallant flatteries. A cruel jealousy was eating Gauguin's heart. How could Mette feel so happy, when he was fighting a life and death struggle with his Art? The only way to fight the hostile atmosphere around him was to feign indifference. He would plug on with his paintings and one of these days they would say,

"What! Gauguin has sold a painting for five thousand francs! I can't believe it—"

And then he would crush them with a cynical smile. Summer came and with it a brightening of his hopes. The sun brought strength to him: the strength to be even more fiercely independent. He was walking on the road that overlooked the Sund—the reserved bathing beach for the élite of Copenhagen. Each of the estates around the bay was equipped with a small cabin for bathing. It was the custom there to bathe separately and unclothed. Looking down he saw a woman walking toward the water. He lit his clay pipe and leaning over the parapet he revelled in the beauty of a nude figure. A young girl sitting on the sand noticed him and called to her mother, pointing to him angrily. The woman ran back to the cabin. It was the Pastor's wife. The

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scandal spread through all the respectable society of Copenhagen. That insolent French loafer had the audacity to deliberately linger over the private beach reserved for the ladies, instead of walking by with downcast eyes. Now there was more reason than ever for his mother-in-law to distrust him. A father of five children and a profligate! Mette did not speak to him for a week. But the greatest scandal of all was to come. It was a rainy Sunday afternoon. Gauguin did not bother dressing. Clovis brought him a tray of food, as his father had determined never to take his Sunday dinner with the clan of the Gads.

In the late afternoon, Mette was having tea with some lady friends. Tea cups in hand — cookies on plates — Chit — Chat — Chatter — Chat!

"Mrs. Peterson is so old-fashioned, she still is wearing her bustle skirt. She walks bent forward from the waist. If I didn't know it was Mrs. Peterson, I'd swear it was a camel." ...

"I tasted a Rod Grod yesterday that was a marvel. It was currant jelly with wine and the cream was sweetened with sugar. I'll surprise my husband with it tonight." ...

"Rossi played the part of Othello marvellously. Of course, he spoke Italian, and I couldn't understand it, but the other actors spoke Danish so I could make some sense out of it." ...

The conversation was approaching the I'm-sorry-to-be-going stage, when Gauguin entered the room in his undershirt, barelegged and in bedroom slippers. He nodded politely to the ladies, gloating over their confusion, took the book he wanted from the bookcase and returned nonchalantly to his own room.

There were tears of mortification in Mette's eyes. She

excused herself to the ladies, who left after expressing sincere condolences that her husband had suddenly turned insane. Mette's sister who remained behind, turned to her, arms akimbo.

"How long are you going to stand that vile husband of yours? If this sort of thing goes on, the Gad family will be disgraced." Mette gestured to her impatiently.

"Don't mix in. I'll talk to him."

"That's all you can do — talk! talk!"

And with a contemptuous laugh she went out.

Mette was firm when she faced Gauguin.

"You've become the laughing-stock of the city. First it was the Pastor's wife and now —"

Gauguin turned the pages of his book wearily. Mette raised her voice.

"Why did you do it?"

"I needed this book. Must I dress to get a book?"

"Where do you think you are — among your Bohemians in Paris? You've lost all sense of shame. Can't you see how pitiable you are as an unsuccessful artist? At your age, too. Why don't you go back to Bertin's? After all, you've had your try. You've been painting for two years and what has come of it?"

Gauguin sprang from his bed and walked frantically about the room.

"To Hell with Bertin's!"

"But, Paul, things can't go on like this."

He turned on her angrily — "Well, do you want to get rid of me? You want me to go back to Paris?"

Mette's voice pleaded.

"It isn't true, but can't you see, Paul? You must do some-

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thing. At your age — with no money — it's stupid to idle the time away."

The dark tint of his skin paled. He was able to make his decisions only after months and even years of laborious ruminations. The idea of returning to Paris came to him the year before, when he could make no progress in business. But, as an artist, living in a world of passivity, of drawn-out contemplation, quick, decisive action was foreign to his nature.

But after a long indecision, Gauguin acted on an impulse. It was so at Bertin's and now the impulse came to him to return to Paris.

"That's settled! I return to Paris!"

CHAPTER IV

A WINTER OF DISCONTENT

THE TRAIN from Copenhagen slid into the immense iron shed of the Gare du Nord. A man and a boy stepped off the third class car in the rear. To the man encumbered with a valise and a travelling blanket, Paris was a city that demanded a franc for a loaf of bread. To the nine-year-old boy it was an exciting playground.

"Oh, papa, look at the gendarmes. They wear green uniforms. In Copenhagen they wear red ones. Look at the sign. Hotel Odessa!"

"That's right, Clovis. You still know your French, don't you?"

"How can I forget, Papa, I am a Parisian!"

Clovis skipped in his gayety. Gauguin was sombrely planning his first move to wrest bread from that city of stone. No more dreaming about rich and generous relatives. There was no other alternative: bitter labor — or starvation.

The following day was a busy one. With his Jongkind neatly wrapped in brown paper, he approached the Ruel Gallery, fully realizing that one frail etching stood between him and hunger. Monsieur Ruel greeted him with the feigned aloofness so hated by artists who have not yet arrived. However, Gauguin was discreet enough to open his conversation politely.

"How are the Impressionists selling, Monsieur Ruel?"

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"Manet is going big. Degas is coming up. Pissarro and Monet — so and so!"

"When will you carry the others — I mean the younger men?"

"Degas and Manet waited twenty years. The younger men can wait as long."

"And if they can't afford to wait?"

"A true artist keeps on painting."

"Yes — poor devils! Well — I've brought back the Jongkind. You know what I paid for it, don't you?"

"Yes, but I can give you only three hundred."

"Surely a Jongkind is worth five hundred."

"Well, I'll give you three hundred and fifty, Monsieur Gauguin."

His voice was decisive. Gauguin took the money. An omnibus, then, led him to rue Carcel in Vaugirard, his address. He passed his former home with the heavy heart of a man who looks back on the splendors of yesterday. Nearby was the studio of Bouillot the sculptor, where he had rented a room the year before he was married, while still a buoyant youth, and where he fussed about, chipping marble figures. Bouillot used to admonish him:

"Be careful, you may be a sculptor some day — and it will be much better for you to stick to banking."

How clearly he remembered those words! But how false they seemed now! Bouillot was only a commercial sculptor, hacking away to fill his belly. He had never burned to explore the mysterious depths of art.

Within an hour he had rented a studio. He paid his twelve francs deposit and returned to the Hotel Odessa to bring Clovis to his new home.

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Clovis blinked his little eyes, blinked at the four bare walls, the dusty skylight and the bare mattress.

Gauguin patted the frail shoulders of his son with his rough square sailor's hands.

"We don't need any furniture, do we? There's more room to play this way."

Clovis kept silent. He saw nothing to play with.

"Wait here for me and I'll bring up something to eat."

While his father was gone, Clovis sat on the mattress with his sad, round eyes, his arms huddled around his knees, his thin little body crouched over. He sat as quietly as a mouse in the lugubrious light of the studio, his little heart breaking for his poor papa, whose forced gayety did not escape his observant eyes. How lonely he was now, away from mama, away from Aline, Paul, Emile—. No more playmates and toys and all the patisserie he could cram into his greedy little stomach.

Gauguin brought back a long roll of white bread, a pound of cheese, a bottle of cheap wine and in a little white bag some cherry tarts. Clovis ate the tarts almost guiltily, because his father would not take any. Gauguin put a newspaper on the floor and broke the bread.

"We don't need any knives and forks, do we, Clovis?"

"Naw!" said Clovis with the air of a tough gamin of the streets. He was so hungry he ate the bread and cheese with a ravenous appetite.

"Don't eat so fast. You'll get sick. You must be a brave little philosopher and chew your bread seventy times before swallowing. Then you'll get twice as much out of it."

Clovis began to count, until his eyes noticed the wine bottle:

"Papa, we have no cups for the wine."

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"Bah! We'll drink from the bottle just like that vagabond I told you about — Villon."

It was getting colder. Clovis was shivering.

"Are you cold, Clovis?"

"Naw!"

"Yes, you are. Here! let me wrap this blanket around you."

"Ou-la-la! I look like an Indian now, papa, don't I?"

"It's getting dark, we'll light the old lamp, and tomorrow we'll both go to school."

"Are you going to school, too, papa?"

"Yes, but mine will be a little different from yours. In a few days I'll sell some pictures, and then we can buy a bed, table, and a few chairs...."

"And picture books, papa. I want some picture books and scissors to cut out the pictures."

That night they lay huddling under the blanket, confiding their hopes to each other until Clovis fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Gauguin's eyes were open all night, wondering how far the three hundred francs would reach after he had bought paints and canvas. Surely he ought to be able to sell his paintings even if they were impressionistic. Surely people were beginning to tire of the paintings that won the Prix de Rome year after year. Such stilted classical subjects: Claudius proclaimed emperor, Ulysses bidding farewell to his wife — all so alike, it seemed that the same man won the Prix de Rome year after year.

The next day Gauguin learned that it was too late in the school season for Clovis to register. He would have to wait until February. In desperation, Gauguin hit upon the idea of presenting Clovis with a stack of newspapers from which he was to cut out all the pictures. A tranquil two

weeks were spent in this way — Clovis clipping away, his father painting. Sometimes Clovis would stop and watch his father attack the canvas with trembling hand, his body as tense as a wolf haunched for his prey. He was ever moving about the picture, fussing with it, staring at it, darting his brush here and there, his eyes lost in the world where neither time nor space existed. When, towards the end of the day, he laid down his brush, it was to sink down wearily on the mattress while Clovis with tender hands stroked his hair.

Gauguin was spurred on by the conviction that some day he would create a masterpiece. It was just beyond the horizon — that magic, felicitous touch of color that would convert his landscape into a hymn to the sun.

By the end of January all the money was gone. Clovis tossed about feverishly on his mattress, his damp little hands dashing aside his blanket, shivering in an icy plague, sweating a fiery bath. The doctor pronounced it small-pox and recommended a nurse. In a daze Gauguin left the room to seek help. The concierge threw up her hands in horror at the mention of small-pox. Gauguin would have to be the nurse himself. He begged the woman at the corner creamery for credit.

“Do you want to get me in bankruptcy?”

Bankruptcy, Assets, Liabilities, Bertin!

Should he go back to Bertin’s? What if he should refuse him? Gauguin would die rather than suffer that humiliation.

The baker was kinder. Two weeks’ credit on bread was extended to him. But he must find a job. The expenses were mounting horribly. He needed money to buy broth and peat for the fire, and medicines, and cotton soaked in alcohol. It was almost impossible to find a job. A philan-

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thropist had recently treated three thousand starved devils to a meal in the armory.

He walked up and down the boulevards like a lost soul. Happy, chattering thousands sat on the sidewalks and in the cafés, cosily warmed by stoves, others sipped their liqueurs or read the journals. Gayety must go on in Paris! There were peddlers selling opera glasses, terriers, green parrots. There were boys in white aprons selling candied apples on sticks. Gauguin had not even a hundred francs to begin the humblest trade, selling canes or jumping jacks. There was a genial artist with his long, gray hair and a Tam o'-Shanter, selling large oil paintings, bowing before the patrons of the cafés, pleading with his hungry eyes. The sight of it sickened Gauguin. If only he had a little chestnut stand or a booth to sell newspapers! There was nothing for him. He could not even become a lazzaroni who, with a filthy oilskin bag and a long stick, with a pin at its end, snooped between people's legs to snatch at cigar butts.

He tramped the streets of Paris in a despairing search, passed the Café de l'Opéra where the wealthy congregated, passed the Café Suède of the actors, the Café Américain of the journalists, the Café Helder of the young roués. Everyone seemed to have his place in society. Only he was an outcast.

An employment office offered him a job as a farm laborer in the South Sea Islands. Gauguin was prone to accept it. How he longed to flee these horrors, this desert of anguish, this cruel Paris. But the image of the fever-racked, emaciated body of Clovis clutching wildly for life tugged at his heart. He passed by an office of a billboard poster company. He entered with the dogged resolution

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that he would force the manager to give him a job. The manager looked up at him from his desk.

"What can I do for you?"

"I need a job."

The manager smiled, perplexed by this genteel-looking man with the refined face.

"You're not the sort of man to post billboards."

"I have a sick child. I haven't a cent."

The words were wrung from his heart. The manager was touched.

"You look strong enough. We pay five francs a day."

It was almost with gratitude that Gauguin smeared the billboards with paste and slapped on posters advertising the wines of Nicolas or the chocolate Menier. That night he hurried to the bedside of Clovis almost exhausted from his work but with five francs in his pocket.

Clovis had been calling him all day. When the boy saw the pale face of his father, his sobbing subsided. Gauguin bathed his little body tenderly with alcohol, relit the fire that was only smouldering, heated the vegetable broth and fed Clovis with a spoon.

"Be a brave boy. You're going to get well. Another day and you'll be standing up."

The soup revived Clovis. His eyes looked gratefully at his father's like a hungry dog grateful for a bone.

"Papa, tell me the story of Sinbad."

And Gauguin described the strange and marvelous adventures of Sinbad in the distant lands of the Roc until Clovis was fast asleep.

Gauguin dared not sleep next to him. He had borrowed a blanket and lay on the hard floor, dozing and waking

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up restlessly in order to give Clovis the medicine he was to take every four hours.

The Calvary lasted three weeks. Up at six in the morning after a broken sleep, building a fire, preparing the soup, feeding Clovis, bathing him in alcohol—then, an entire day at the back-breaking labor of slapping up posters in order to hurry home with five francs for the bread, the soup, the firewood, and the medicines.

Despite the long hours in a room that was chilled when the fire died down, despite the meagre diet, despite the long, lonely day, twisting on his mattress, Clovis, as if by some miracle, recovered. He was soon able to prepare the soup for himself and to keep the fire burning. But the happy lad who came to Paris a few months before with the eager eyes of adventure, was now subdued and melancholy. He was too crushed by his father's poverty to dare ask him for the cakes he loved so much.

Even Gauguin had lost the raillery that amused Clovis during the first trying days. In the evening, by the dim light of the oil lamp, they sat down to their supper of bread, soup and cheese, saying very little to each other.

The boy had to keep to his room all day because he did not have shoes. He saw only too clearly that his father had no money for toys that would have kept his mind busy during the day. He did not utter a complaint. The proud stoicism of his father had brought iron into his little heart and after supper he would only say in a brave voice:

“Goodnight, papa!”

“Goodnight, my boy,” and Gauguin sat up to read the newspaper gossip about the visit of the Ambassador from China or the scandalous success of an immoral comedy. But he could not escape the remorse of having brought

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Clovis to such a joyless poverty. How heroic this little boy.

He was not ashamed of his father, who had literally been kicked out of his family. Only his mother was ashamed of having a billboard-poster for a husband. In a bitter mood, Gauguin wrote to Mette:

“When all is said and done there is but one crime — adultery — and outside of this everything may be forgiven. It is not right and just that you should be thrown out of your home — but it is reasonable that I should be thrown out of mine. Therefore I trust I do not do too much wrong to you, if I create a new home — and in this new dwelling I will paste up my billboards. Everybody blushes in his own way —

“My most *loving* greetings to your family!

“YOUR WEDDED HALF.”

Fortunately, the manager of the poster company found Gauguin an intelligent enough man, and he put him in charge of the publicity department at two hundred francs a month. With the extra money he was able to place Clovis in a pension outside of Paris, where he hoped the air and the food of the country would build up his wasted and scarred boy. The big, round, brooding eyes of Clovis already foreshadowed a sorrowful destiny. Gauguin hugged his son and turned his back on him only to stiffen his front on a world that seemed intent upon persecuting him.

All the letters that Mette wrote him were heavy with the monotonous gray of a soul forever complaining of her hard lot. No position could be worse than hers, separated from her husband and forced to earn a living for herself. Her husband did not love her any more, because she was

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only a mother and not a wife. If only he could reestablish himself at Bertin's, then the past would be forgotten and they could live happily together again. An eternal complaint that seemed to stretch from Copenhagen to Paris and continually beat against his heart. But Gauguin answered:

"I have received your letter describing your sad position and I have made some effort to agree with you, but I confess I do not think it is as sad as you would have it. You are in your house, conveniently enough furnished, surrounded by your children, engaged in work difficult enough but which pleases you. You see people, since you like the society of women and of your compatriots. You enjoy yourself sometimes. You have the benefits of marriage without the inconvenience of a husband. What more do you wish if not a little money? While I am driven out of my house and I live where? Among four walls, a bed, a table, without fire, without a single soul."

The exposure to the damp coldness of Paris, while pasting posters, the overindulgence in *brûle gosiers* (throat-scorchers) and *casse poitrines* (chest-smashers), to keep himself warm, the lack of sleep while attending Clovis and the stinted diet proved too much for him. He was forced to the hospital with a delirious fever.

Gauguin thought himself on his death bed. What a fatal mistake to have sought anything else but money. Almost all the artists were painting and writing to please the public. What rash folly to dare devote himself only to what pleased him. Now he was a defeated man — alone — with no friends to visit him on his sick-bed.

The nurse smiled at him. Some nuns prayed for him. But they would be the last to understand him if he were

well. He wouldn't write to Mette. She would read the account of his death in a letter—and she would forbid the children ever to mention his name. Why should he blame Mette? Did he not deceive her by marrying her as a respectable bank clerk? If she knew the demon that lurked within him, she would have never accepted him. What queer blood was in him that doomed him to such an ignoble end?

His father was a melancholy Celt. His mother was a strange mixture of French and Peruvian with, perhaps, an Indian strain. His grandmother possessed the hauteur and the stoicism of a Spaniard, who could trace her family back to the Borgias of Italy. His grandfather, part Arab and Spanish, had a headstrong enthusiasm and irritability. This bizarre mélange of blood and sensibilities erupted in the middle of his life and sent him reeling through a chaos of suffering into a bed of charity.

He trembled with fear.

"Jesus! you can't do this to me. I am a great artist. I must live. I have a new vision to bring to the world. It is still dim but it is coming. Save me. I swear I will be faithful to it."

His grip on life tightened. He would not die like this—a beggar.

"O Mette—Aline—Clovis—some day we will all be together again—a happy family once more—I will be good to you. I will make money for you. I will desert the dream of Art—No! No! Not that! O God, why am I placed in this Hell? I love my family, but I cannot desert my Art to be with them. I love my Art but I must desert my family to do it justice. Two giants are pulling me, tearing me apart."

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A sleep of exhaustion and the crisis was over. In twenty-seven days he was walking again. A sardonic Gauguin wrote to Mette:

"I thought I'd pass out this time, but bah! this damned body of iron holds on."

CHAPTER V

THE INDIAN AND THE SENSITIVE

WHEN HE walked out of the hospital Paris smiled upon him with its eternal, fixed smile. The first warm days of Spring had arrived and the Marchand de Coco walked the streets selling cups of chocolate at a sou a cup. A sign plastered before a café proclaimed — *Venez, venez boire avec nous, le vin à quat' sous*. When he entered a tobacconist to buy some Bordeaux cigars, the shopkeeper smilingly urged him to buy a lottery ticket and win a fortune of a hundred thousand francs. Fifty clowns walked by, smiles painted on their faces, carrying posters urging him to see the man who raised a hundredweight of granite with his teeth, to see the Bearded Lady, Mr. Chopps the dwarf and the Spotted Girl at the great Gingerbread Fair. Omnibuses, coupés, victorias rumbled by, as the drivers cheerfully cracked their long whips within an inch of the horses' noses. Everywhere the fixed smile of a city intent upon moving to the rhythm of a merry-go-round.

Gauguin was in no mood to enter his bare studio. He walked on to Schuffenecker's, the one friend towards whom it was never necessary to play a part. Like Gauguin, Schuffenecker had retired from a remunerative bank employment to devote himself to painting, but unlike Gauguin, he had retired with a comfortable income. He was a bearded little man with timid, dreamy eyes who loved nothing better

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than the peace and quietude of a countryside. He was waiting impatiently for the warm weather when he could pack up and take the first train out of Paris with his wife and daughter. Schuffenecker—a charming man to know in days of distress: an unobtrusive man, forgotten in days of triumph!

“For Heaven’s sake, Paul! Where have you been all this while? How you forget your friends.”

“I have just come from the hospital.”

“Why didn’t you let me know?”

“When trouble comes I hide away in some hole like an old dog.”

“How you talk! Of what use are friends if they don’t help you in hard times? Sit down and have a glass of wine. We’ll take dinner later. Tell me how are Mette and the children?”

“Mette is well enough, and the children are forgetting their father. Poor Clovis is run down at a pension. I’ll see him tomorrow.”

“You look run down yourself. Why don’t you go with us to Brittany.”

“Yes, I love Brittany...if I can only sell some paintings.”

“I’m sure you will. It’s not like the old days. The tide’s turning for the Impressionists. I was talking to Monsieur Ruel the other day. He tells me the Americans are beginning to buy his Manets and Renoirs. He’ll make a fortune yet.”

“Yes—he’ll make a fortune and we’ll get the glory.”

Schuffenecker shrugged his shoulders.

“What do you expect? But you won’t have to worry long. Everybody speaks of you as the coming painter. If I could only get the light you put into your paintings.”

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"It's only a trick! We'll have colored photography one of these days that will show up Impressionism for what it is. I must get away from that sort of thing."

And yet Gauguin trembled at the thought that at the exhibition of the Impressionists at rue de Pelletier, nineteen of his latest canvases, reeking with "that sort of thing," were to decide his artistic career.

It was the fashionable thing to visit the exhibition of the Impressionists for a good laugh. Society began to laugh while they were still on the street. They laughed walking up the steps, and they were convulsed with laughter the moment they saw the canvases. The distorted paintings of Cézanne made them hysterical.

The discriminating few passed Gauguin's canvases perfunctorily and congregated before those of Seurat. The critics paid the usual homage to Renoir and Degas, to Monet and Pissarro and devoted only a short paragraph to Gauguin. He was still under the unfortunate influence of Pissarro. A second-rate painter from whom startling things need not be expected.

Gauguin laid down the magazine with weary hands. He had renounced everything—family, wealth, comfort, to give himself to the splendid and rare visions of his imagination. But the visions on the canvas were neither splendid nor rare. Interesting enough, perhaps, to warrant a pat on the shoulder as a good second-rate artist. But all glory and power to the firsts—the champions—those few geniuses with the miraculous power of conveying a rare emotion to a jaded world.

There was still a necessary experimental period through which Gauguin must pass in order to discover himself. He must get away to some wilderness where in solitude he

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would be able to work in absolute independence with no servile catering to the tastes of the day. There was a unique, primitive force within him, crying to be liberated. Some found it sooner. Some later. He had begun late. He must be humble and wait for its coming. Softly he murmured to himself:

"I have no complaint to make. Like Jesus, I say, the flesh is the flesh, the spirit is the spirit. Thanks to this, a small sum of money satisfies my flesh and my spirit is left in peace."

There was one round-shouldered man with small eyes that saw deeply into things, who felt a kinship for this derelict banker struggling so valiantly to be recognized as an artist. His name was Degas. And he had said to Gauguin, "You have your foot in the stirrup." He bought several of Gauguin's canvases and with this sum Gauguin could now retreat to the wilderness where his melancholic soul was drawn. It was the bare, dull landscape of Brittany that called to the sadness within him. Schuffenecker had mentioned Pont Aven. It was in this sleepy little village that he established himself at a pension run by Madame Gloanec for fifty-five francs a month.

Church bells in Gothic towers were sweet silver notes of peace and tranquillity spreading over the sleepy valleys of Brittany. Everywhere there was resignation to death. Every day superstitious peasants prayed in Ossuaries so that the souls of their ancestors might go through their travail of Hell and Purgatory more quickly. There was not a well that did not have stone tops sculptured with hearts and crosses. Even the rude piles of prehistoric stones—the Menhirs and the solitary Dolmens—had chiselled on them the

figure of Christ against which wives rubbed themselves on dark nights that they might be blessed with children.

Shepherd women dozed on hillsides lulled to sleep by the tinkling bells of the sheep they tended. Woodchoppers beside their thatched cottages sawed wood into neat piles or burned it into charcoal. And not far away was the granite rocked coast of Brittany where fishermen brought in their catch of sardines at the end of the day.

There were moonlit nights when Gauguin joined in a *pardon* with the peasants — a religious festival during which parishioners followed a chanting priest into a woodland glen or a barren moor where a fire was lit and hymns were sung in prayers for the dead.

Gauguin communed with these peasants, so blindly immersed in Celtic lore and ritual, and this atmosphere and this life brought a subtle change in his art. His men and women were now drawn in rough outline. The spotted trees merged into sombre, almost black tones. He was not copying Nature. He was recreating it in his own decorative fashion.

Most of the painters in the Gloanec pension would have nothing to do with this charlatan, who put such brusque and clumsy figures in his pictures. They not only resented his barbaric style, but they felt ill-at-ease with a man whose direct, curt speech, cool disdain and freedom of manner were too pretentious for his poverty.

Besides, there was a repelling note in the eyes of Gauguin, blue and deep-set, a sort of cunning animal revery as if longing for and plotting escape. To preserve peace, Madame Gloanec had to serve Gauguin and his three friends in a separate room. But even they found him a difficult man to cope with. There were days when he would not

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utter a word and Schuffenecker himself would not receive a reply to a civil question.

A young boy of seventeen, Emile Bernard, who had walked and worked his way from Paris by painting portraits of innkeepers and farmers, joined the table of Gauguin.

One day when Emile asked for a criticism of his paintings Gauguin brutally answered:

"You trace a drawing, then you trace this tracing, and so on, till the moment when, like the ostrich with his head in the sand, you decide it does not resemble the original any longer. Then! you sign."

They had very little to say to each other the rest of the summer. Gauguin's friends concluded that it was better to leave him alone. An artist finds his greatest strength in solitude.

In the seclusion of his room, he was struggling fiercely with the tender side of his nature, that longed for the love and understanding of a happy family life. He could not get the vision of Mette out of his mind. Mette had written him that she had to undergo a surgical operation. It might be cancer. He had replied with a tender letter. "If I could take your place for the operation, I would gladly do so." He had meant it with a full heart.

Why was she letting such a long time lapse without writing? Of course, his own letters were not particularly cheering, but what did she expect? He had suffered so much, it was almost past human endurance. Ah — if one day, after years of hardship, he succeeded in gaining recognition as an artist, would she come back to him with love or hate? It would be love, for at heart she was good, and somewhat noble. But when — when would that day come? What a curse was poverty, how degraded the civilization

that would not allow him to live with his family because of his compelling devotion to art. Was it an unconscious plea for help that he wrote to Mette?

"There are two natures in me—the Indian and the sensitive. The sensitive is disappearing and the Indian will be left in firm possession."

And so whenever the idealists at the table praised progress and civilization, Gauguin spat.

"Civilization—In his pulpit the Priest babbles about Hell, in their seats the ladies talk about the fashions. The castle next to the hovel, a Cathedral next to a brothel. Hypocrisy everywhere. Bah—give me a simple savage before a well-fed bourgeois."

Laval, his tall, dark-haired friend, whose soft, sad eyes behind scholarly glasses were eternal question-marks, wondered if human beings could be happy anywhere.

"Why not?" Gauguin barked back. "Somewhere in the Pacific there is an island where people do without bureaucrats and magistrates. Why all this furious preoccupation with morality? What devil is behind it creating hardness and moroseness in so many kindly men, so many amiable women? What the devil! Do people think themselves cocks or capons? Must we come to an artificial laying of eggs?"

Laval would not be sidetracked.

"Do you say there is an island in the Pacific?"

"Yes—there are islands in the Pacific where people give themselves up absolutely to their instincts and they don't have to fight battles with themselves about money or morality. Why—the light there is more radiant, the colors more brilliant, there are no clothes to conceal the beauty of the human body and joy there is as natural as breathing."

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There was a silence about the table as if a promised land had been suddenly revealed to them. Laval's eyes glowed. Bernard clutched his knees in the intensity of his desire. Schuffenecker, a good family man, felt vaguely disturbed about his wife and daughter. Finally Laval said, "Why not go there?"

Why not? The question never left Gauguin's mind. It was late Fall. His money was almost gone. He would kill himself rather than be the beggar he was last Winter in Paris. In a mood of black despair he bought a revolver. With the pull of a trigger all his miseries will come to an end. But the misty image of a remote isle in a forlorn sea never left Gauguin's table. As the weather became colder his soul instinctively sought refuge in the balmy visions of the equator.

Once Gauguin told them an experience of his early days as a sailor.

"The assistant pilot whom I had replaced on the *Luzitano* bound for Rio had given me a little package and a letter with the understanding that it was to reach the hands of Madame Aimée, Rua do Ouvidar of Rio de Janeiro. When I presented them to the scented lady in the flowing voluminous gown she read the letter, and taking me by the hand, said, 'How handsome you are—and only seventeen!'

"And the charming Aimée, a leading actress in an Offenbach opera and skilled in the art of volupté, knew just how to sink in my arms. What an absolutely delicious month with that insatiable siren! Every one paid court to her, even the son of the Czar of Russia. He was a midshipman in a training ship. He was spending so many thousands of rubles on her that the ship's commander tried to

get the French consul to intervene, but who dared interfere with the son of the Czar of Russia? It cost the czarevitch pearl necklaces and emerald rings. It only cost me headaches the morning after."

They kept themselves warm till late at night with many more spicy stories. But Gauguin could not sleep. He would have given half his life for the embrace of a beloved one. Instead the damnable torture of an artist. An artist deserved the little free love he could get out of life. How else compensate for the acid irritant of seeking a vision never seen before?

It was a haggard Gauguin that woke the next morning. Seguin, another Impressionist who had recently joined his group, was daubing patches of color on a picture at the other end of the room. To Gauguin it was the sacred duty of an artist never to do anything that had been done before. His soul was so revolted at Seguin's imitative brush strokes that he looked menacingly toward him, took the revolver out of a drawer, and fondled it dangerously. Seguin was already too well acquainted with the terrific moods of Gauguin to take a second hint.... He took his canvas, easel and himself out of the room as quickly as he could. The Gauguin who left for Paris a few days later with ten francs in his pocket was an "Indian" not to be fooled with.

THE PINK SHRIMPS

THE MOULIN DE LA GALETTE is perched on Montmartre overlooking the great city of Paris. Its two giant wheels are beckoning arms of pleasure to the slums and studios of Paris. At night revellers climb the steep hill and seat themselves around the cast iron tables under the oil lamps swinging on wires.

Brigands, cutthroats, pimps and pickpurses wear the cloth caps of bullies, their hands deep in their pockets, likely as not clutching a knife. Their eyes are constantly shifting between their prospective prey and the two gendarmes seated in a corner. Journalists and wrestlers in bowlers regale themselves with smutty stories or wager bets as to the shape and size of the legs of girls hidden beneath voluminous petticoats. When the girls walk by, a powerful wrestler with a pug nose uses his cane to lift their skirts. Here and there a top silk hat. A fat bourgeois examines with his pig eyes the women, gloatingly making his choice for the night. Prostitutes with thick rouge smeared on cheeks and lips, blue penciling under their eyes, walk about bumping suggestively into yokels from Normandy or fat, sweating bakers.

The musicians rest after a strenuous Mazurka. A garçon brings them glasses of cherry brandy which they swallow at a gulp.

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At a table near the orchestra is sitting Laval, next to him Gauguin. Years of suffering have eaten into his round face until it is now bony and massive. There is a wary manner about him despite the sleepy effect of the heavy lids over his blue eyes. His head is immobile but his eyes shift from one table to another. He rarely smiles, as if smiling were a weakness to be overcome. He is taking advantage of the lull in the orchestra to tell a story.

At the table next to Gauguin squats the sharp-nosed, hunchbacked dwarf—Toulouse Lautrec. Beside him is a pale-faced red-bearded man looking with a certain wonder at everything around him: Vincent Van Gogh. Van Gogh stares from time to time at Gauguin as if anxious to speak with him. But Gauguin has a tight fist around a skull-knobbed cane. An expression of worldly disgust lines his face. Van Gogh is too timid to penetrate that formidable mask. In the confusion of voices, he does not hear the story Gauguin is telling Laval.

"The snow is falling. The poor are suffering. The landlords do not understand that. On this December day in the Rue Lepic there is a fantastically dressed, shivering man who is hurrying to reach the outer boulevards. He is wrapped in a sheepskin coat with a cap of rabbit fur and and he has a bristling red beard. He looks like a drover but for his white graceful hands and blue eyes that are so clear and childish. Hurriedly he goes into a shop where they sell old ironwork, and cheap oil paintings.

"Poor artist! He has put a fragment of his soul into the canvas which he holds before the dealer. It is a small still life—pink shrimps on a piece of pink paper.

"Can you give me a little money for this canvas to help me pay my rent?"

THE PINK SHRIMPS

"*Mon dieu*, my friend, my trade is getting difficult, too. You know your paintings are not gay. The Bouguereaus are the thing nowadays. Well, they say you have talent and I should like to do something for you. Come, here are a hundred sous."

"He takes it without a murmur, thanks the shopkeeper and goes out. When he has nearly reached his lodging a poor woman just out of St. Lazare smiles at the painter, hoping for his patronage. The beautiful white hand emerges from the overcoat. He cannot help himself. He gives the five francs and quickly, as if ashamed of his charity, he makes off with his still empty stomach. A day will come. I see it as if it had already come. I enter Room No. 9 at the auction gallery. The auctioneer is selling a collection of pictures as I go in. Four hundred francs for the Pink Shrimps—450—500. Come, gentlemen, it is worth more than that. No one says anything—gone—the Pink Shrimps by Vincent Van Gogh."

Lautrec has white sheets of paper before him, on which he sketches caricatures with a nervous exasperation that never leaves him. He seems to scrutinize the human animals around him, to catch them when they throw off their social poses in their whirl of pleasure. With a few mordant strokes he has pinned them as they are—lascivious, leering, cunning. He shades their faces with green shadows to give a sickly impression to their obscenity. Lautrec gloats in this denuded revelation of the bestial in man. To him a prostitute is a prostitute and not a cocotte.

The good, frank face of Van Gogh is pained by the sketch. Why should one be malicious, when everything is so wonderful in Paris? He sees only goodness around him. Lautrec might be foul-mouthed, a dipsomaniac, but God

was in him because he was an artist. And God was in all that sweating crowd because they were so unabashed in enjoying themselves. And to the pure soul of Van Gogh, Gauguin could be Christ himself, for Lautrec had just told him the amazing story of the banker who had given up his family and his wealth for his art.

The drums begin to roll.... The orchestra bursts into a contagious snappy rhythm — and to a thunderous clapping of hands, three dancers suddenly spring into the middle of the dance floor. One, two, three and they are performing the famous *Chahut* — a quadrille with steps punctuated by high kicks and splits.

La Melinette with her long, black curls, décolleté to the waist, turns over backward and touches the floor with her shoulders, curling her body lasciviously, as the men scream for more. La Goulue, with her tortured mouth and vulture face, dances in a macabre counterpoint of sensuality and death. While Valentin, a disjointed acrobat, moves between them in amazing leaps and spectacular pinwheels. The dancers swing faster and faster on the dance floor edged by a mass of onlookers. The musicians play more savagely. The trombones blare. The violins are a scream of pain. The women utter wild cries. The 'cellist bangs his instrument with his fist. An old man, flushed with drink, gambols in a corner, slapping his thighs. Valentin pirouettes endlessly, there is a long bray from the corner and the dance is over.

Lautrec turns excitedly to Van Gogh:

"What positions — marvellous, I'll invite them over."

The orchestra breaks out into a popular quadrille. The dance floor is choked with wriggling, vibrating dancers. A signal to the waiter from Lautrec, and the garçon rushes

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out to bring the Chahut dancers. Toulouse Lautrec is a Count and of a family that would have made him a Marshal of France if there were a King in Versailles. He is honored as a Count and loved because of his liberality. La Melinette and la Goulue know that they can order the rarest drinks when Lautrec is treating them. La Melinette is Lautrec's favorite. The thirty-year-old houri wears curls and a sensational short, white dress. There is a depraved virginity about her pretensions of being sweet sixteen. She feigns innocence but Lautrec sketches her as vice enthroned. La Goulue sits on Van Gogh's lap and drinks to his red beard. Van Gogh gently seats her next to him. He had preached to the miners of a Belgian town. He could never treat loose women as creatures of his pleasure. He had married one of them and still adored her. He smiles uneasily at La Goulue and rises. He is glad of an excuse that will let him sit at Gauguin's table. La Goulue forgets him. She loves nothing better than to be left alone and to drink herself into a mood of remorse and tears. Gauguin moves his chair so that Van Gogh can be more comfortable. Van Gogh has a way of cutting straight to essentials.

"Lautrec has been telling me about your new theory. He has little use for it, but I'm interested."

Gauguin warms up to this humble Dutch peasant, who like himself is blunt because he is, by nature, so shy.

"You mean the theory of Professor Mani Vehni Zunbul Zadi?" Van Gogh is unaware that Gauguin is facetious. He nods his head eagerly. Gauguin is ashamed of his raillery. He becomes serious.

"The idea is to get a color vibration similar to that in an Oriental carpet. I have found a translation of a Persian book treating of the distribution of colors in the making

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of carpets. But I can't go into a theory of beauty in a filthy dance hall. Be at Goupil's tomorrow morning, I'll explain it to you."

"I'll surely come. Are you going back to Pont Aven this Spring?"

"No — I'm going to the Pacific."

Van Gogh is puzzled.

"The Pacific?"

"Yes — Laval and I will settle down in an island down there. It's a tropical Paradise."

"But why go to the Pacific? There is so much to paint in Paris."

Gauguin stares at the noisy twining mass of dancers.

"Lautrec is in love with all this — with vice. You are in love with virtue. You will find your Paradise in a simple country town. There you can paint shrimps and sunflowers and be happy. I must find a land where neither vice nor virtue exists — only calm and sunlight — blue seas and wild mountains, and men who are resigned to Nature, who eat when they want, drink when they desire, never deny the impulse of love, who know that destruction is the beginning and end of all things."

"But — you will be terribly lonely."

"We are all doomed to loneliness. Besides, Laval and myself will be too busy painting there."

Van Gogh, the Preacher, shakes his head sorrowfully.

"You are trying to escape from yourself. But you never will. Why don't you go with me to Southern France? I'll get enough money for the two of us."

"No — I must get away from Paris — from civilization. Everything here is false, false politics, false morality, false religion. It is organized materialism that benefits the un-

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scrupulous wealthy and forbids the thinker or the artist the right to live. It is the tyranny of money that is destroying mankind. My land will be a land without money."

Van Gogh is not convinced. He is anxious to take Gauguin with him.

"But what about your family — your son, Clovis?"

Gauguin stiffens in his chair. He rises and walks away hurriedly. Van Gogh's face is all remorse and perplexity. He turns to Laval pleadingly. Laval swallows his cognac at one gulp.

"You shouldn't have mentioned his boy. He sold his only Pissarro to get the fare to Panama. We'll find work at the canal until we save enough to settle in Tobago. He can't visit Clovis because he owes two months' pay at the pension. It is cruel, but what can he do?"

Van Gogh bends his head as if in prayer.

CHAPTER VII

PANAMA—THE MACHINE

"THE LIFE of its inhabitants is simple, and is seemingly a very happy and contented one. Their wants are few and nature seems to supply them all. It is famous for its magnificent pineapples, and it is well worth a trip to enjoy that luscious fruit matured on its stalk. The waters abound in fish and turtles and small oysters. In a gorge there is an eternal spring of pure, cold water. The island is bathed in perpetual sunshine, clad in eternal green, and it is one of nature's most beautiful spots."

Included with this blurb depicting the lovely island of Tobago were photographs of elegant Frenchmen in white shirts and duck trousers lolling at their ease under palm trees beside a placid lagoon.

Gauguin, on his way to Panama, planned to purchase a few acres of land in Tobago, to build a windowed studio on a hill-top, and establish a new school of art in which Impressionists would be forbidden. In his letter to Mette he pleaded with her to take Clovis from the pension, to get away from Europe, which was a desert for the poor, and to emigrate with the children to Tobago, where they could all live happily together.

"But all this is still in the air. Now I am travelling as a sick man in order to recuperate a little myself."

PANAMA—THE MACHINE

All he had to do, for the realization of such dreams, was to help dig the ditch across Panama at six hundred francs a month. Within a year he could retire to Tobago and wax wealthy on the proceeds of pineapples and paintings.

Gauguin and Laval were only two of thousands who were rushing to the golden wages of the Isthmus. In France, itself, millions had put their money and their hopes in the canal that would bring the Orient six thousand miles nearer to Europe.

France could not forget that almost every country of Europe knelt in homage and paid taxes to Napoleon, the Great. Fifty years later there was but one outlet for her thirst to regain glory and power: the deserts and jungles of Africa and Asia. Louis XIV, the Sun King, threw away America to the British in 1760. The British stole the sun from the French which has never ceased shining upon the Union Jack. The tricolor tried to avenge itself by spreading over the Sahara, the Congo, Indo-China. But to reach Indo-China it had to dip to the Union Jack over the Suez Canal. In 1881, France turned her hopes eagerly to the Isthmus of Panama, "the gateway to the Pacific and the heart of the Universe." By digging a canal through Panama, France would regain at one blow the prestige she had lost under Louis XIV, and her place in the sun would be secured forever.

The French pocketbook subscribed enthusiastically to the shares of the Panama Universal Interoceanic Company created by Ferdinand de Lesseps. That great engineer had already dug the Suez canal. With millions at his disposal, he called for workers, shopkeepers, builders, doctors, engi-

neers—French warships, French troops, French consuls and the French flag. Within a year the Panama jungle was teeming with fifteen thousand laborers, plunged in a life-and-death struggle with Nature.

For every five hundred cubic yards excavated, the Earth demanded a human soul. Labor agents were ever assembling new blood. Negroes, Chinamen, Mexicans, South-American Indians streamed in by hundreds with every ship. But they did not know they were going to a battle-front against an invisible enemy: the virulent germ of yellow fever. Gauguin and Laval had their first premonition when they saw the low, sultry, misty shore of the infested Isthmus. Only when they landed did they realize in what a Hell they were trapped.

Only the month before, six hundred Chinese had arrived. No sooner had they walked off the gangplank than twenty-seven became chilled and dizzy. They were rushed to the hospital and four days later they were rotting, yellow corpses, victims of yellow fever.

The disease mowed them down like a scythe. All felt doomed. Some tied rocks around their necks and threw themselves into the river. Others sat on the beach at low tide, calmly smoking their opium pipes, and waited for the waves to mount upon them in the evening, higher and higher until they were smothered in watery graves. Still others, less courageous, bribed and begged their friends to fire a revolver into their temples. Any death was preferable to the horrible, choking disease of the yellow fever. A grim proverb spread over the land, "There are no sick in Panama. There are only the dead."

The two artists are marched with three hundred others,

PANAMA—THE MACHINE

flanked by gendarmes with drawn pistols, to take their positions as humble servitors to a monster dredge. The great dredges are the slave drivers of Panama. Their whips of iron allow no hesitation, no loitering.

Ever a mile in advance the land must be prepared for the metal Leviathan. Five hundred slaves scoop up sand, scoop to rock level, preparing a wet path for the dredge. Another gang drills holes in the stone. A tremendous hammering sound of steel explosively pushing iron rods into rock booms against the ear-drums as a great blast of dynamite splits the rock into splinters. Water is flooded over the mangled granite stratum and the hungry dredge is floated into place for its gluttonous meal.

It seems as if, by some curious sport of Nature, a horde of prehistoric monsters had risen — phœnixlike — from the jungle and were wading through swampy paths across the Isthmus. Living monsters of iron, they hiss, and crunch and splutter forward. With the sizzle of steam, the clank of chains, the roar of cylinder, pistons, and fly-wheels, the iron dragon paws out layer after layer of broken rock, and hoists it up into hundreds of wagons, crouching on the embankment.

Nothing disturbs the onward path of the rock-eater. Men may turn pale, choke for breath, look wildly about with bloodshot eyes. Doctors in white uniforms rush to them and hurry them off to the hospital on stretchers. Other men take their places, but the fiery machine moves serenely on. There may be the fatal scream of a negro bitten by a coral snake or a catapulting scorpion. But the clank of a piston is louder still. Mangrove swamps on either side of the dredge may bring an interminable swarm of long-proboscised mos-

quitoes that pierce through the workers' shirts like a thousand needles. But the fire-eater, impervious to pain, exults in its swinging, iron arms. The sky may suddenly darken and the clouds may pour down rain so dense that objects blur. The men, soaked to the skin, can only bend their shoulders helplessly over shovels, and curse through their teeth. But the hot belly of the great behemoth is untouched, while the rain washes off its dust and puts a shine on its black and glistening limbs. The burning sun may shoot down its blazing spears, sapping the energy of the sweating toilers, but the fierce dredge moves on twenty yards an hour, gorging mouthfuls of slime and rock, swinging its head up high, and spewing out the mess with clocklike rhythm.

Chug! chug! chug! cr-u-u-nch!

"I'm gonna make dat yaller bitch tonight."

The thick lips of the Jamaica nigger curl sensuously.

Hiss! Ratatat!

"Jussa three months an' I hava plenty da mon' to senda Angelica."

The Italian digger wipes his brow with his red bandanna handkerchief.

Bump! Bump! Bump! Whirr-r!

"In Amelica makee laundly with Sing Lee Sing."

The Chinaman looks craftily around him, fearful lest his thoughts be known.

Clank — Clank — Bang — Bang — Boom!

"The path to Hell is paved with good intentions."

Laval curses his romantic gullibility that led him to this purgatory.

Roar-r-r! Squeak-k-k!

PANAMA—THE MACHINE

Gauguin's shovel unearths an army of ants.

"Better to be an ant, unfeeling, blind and obedient, than to be a human ant."

And in his new two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar mansion in Colon, the director-general writes happily to his chief in Paris, "So far we have excavated one million four hundred thousand cubic yards. This will be a record year."

Darkness mercifully descends. There is a great rush for the bars, where rum will stupefy the "gallant army of ditch diggers" into forgetfulness. And there are thousands of prostitutes, black, yellow and white, offering a half hour of bliss for the price of six hours of neck-breaking labor.

Every one carries a machete for self-protection. Frequent throat-cuttings by drunken blacks add to the death list. Although Sunday mornings are peaceful with church bells, Sunday afternoons are rent with blood-thirsty cries around bull rings, as toreadors plunge banderillas into the necks of bulls. The banderillas explode into the bulls, who, in an agony of rage, bleeding profusely, beat the sand with their hoofs, their wild bellows drowned out by the exultant roar of the spectators.

Five-thirty in the morning till six at night — under the blazing sun or tropical downpour — Gauguin must stoop over his shovel and swing it up down, up down. Twenty more days, two hundred and forty hours, to save enough francs to escape to Martinique, away from these frightful machines that are crushing all sensitivities in his soul. He has to brutalize his language when he writes to Mette to make her sense to what pit of life he has descended.

"For having p—— in an infected hole full of broken

PAUL GAUGUIN

bottles and s——, they had made me cross all Panama, led by gendarmes, and, finally, they have made me pay a fine of one piastre. I should have liked to plug all these gendarmes, but, here, the cops are fast workers. They are just a few steps behind you, and if you move, they'll plug a bullet into your head."

CHAPTER VIII

A DARK PARADISE

A STEEL STEAMER with orange and black funnels slides into the harbor of Saint Pierre. "Let her go," the pilot cries and the anchor rumbles into the water. There booms a cannon and from the wooded recesses of Mont Pelée come answering echoes that are peals of laughter to Gauguin and Laval. At Panama they had visioned lethal shores which reminded them of old religious paintings depicting the gloomy gates of Hell. At Martinique they drink, with eager eyes, a richly colored canvas in Cézanne's manner — red-tiled roofs precipitously leaning over Hooker-green pastures. Only one false note mars the effect of this tropical paradise. The sugar landing below the gangplank which Gauguin descends is called Place Bertin.

A half dozen mulattoes fight for their baggage. Gauguin gives his valise to a slim boy, whose offer of a room for ten francs monthly is the most persuasive. Besides, the boy had a charming way of introducing himself: "Be good to Stéphane and Stéphane will be good to you."

They follow him up the main street, Rue de Victor Hugo, as narrow and steep as a path in the jungle. Everywhere colors blind the eyes and throb in the brain. Supple natives with bodies like goddesses, noble, rhythmic, dressed in crimson robes, bright yellow turbans, wearing rose and

blue foulards, necklaces, brooches and bracelets of delicate, whipped gold. Winding in and out of endless blind-white streets, baskets miraculously poised upon their heads, they cry out in melodic tones, "Who, dear, wishes mangoes, clay water-vessels, cooking-pots, fish fresh from the sea."

Two men carrying a grand piano on their heads with utter ease and grace block, for a second, the passage of Stéphane, in the narrow street. Gauguin and Laval are soon following Stéphane across the market place, where soft and caressing voices mingle in talk and laughter.

Boatloads of tropical fish iridescent and hyaline-striped and rainbow-streaked, with strange names and shapes, are piled here; and there, heaps of fruits and vegetables; guavas, pommes cythère of red and yellow, christophines of white and green load the trays—things never seen, never heard of by the dwellers of the pale north. From the towers of the white cathedral yonder, bells sing out in liquid peals, soft and gentle, blended with a moaning sound: an undercurrent of negro superstition.

Stéphane climbs still higher, passing the gray colossal statue of Christ that seems so out of place amidst the gay, multitudinous colors. At last, far above the peaked city roofs, just as the foot of the wood-clad mornes, Stéphane whistles before a yellow stucco cottage and shouts out, "Manm Yzore, two white men, ten francs a month."

His mother, a mulatto giantess, steps out and, with an easy, kind smile, and without a trace of obsequiousness, says:

"Bonjou', Missie, Entrez!"

*

THE SITUATION of their room on the outskirts of the city was a lucky one, for the smiling face of Saint Pierre was

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being pitted with small-pox. The plague was growing to such terrible proportions that the city was quarantined and no more ships could enter that summer.

But the artists, itching to hold a paint brush, were happy enough to remain on the hillside overlooking the city. They set up their easels on a hillock and looked about for forms and colors to paint. Their hands were paralyzed. They were crushed by the intense whiteness of the blinding light, and the jewel-like blaze of colors unknown to the artists' palette. They could only stand there stupefied, with the uncanny feeling that they were seeing the world as it was first created in some pre-glacial age. The deeper they gazed into the jungle the more fantastic it became.

Plumy fronds of arborescent ferns, great balsiers with leaves ten feet long, exquisitely slender bamboos, all intertwined with emerald veins of parasitic roots, giant creepers foaming with flowers of a thousand wild unpaintable mad colors. Even more terrifying were the snakes and poisonous insects that could not be seen, but distinctly heard with their droning, clacking, guggling and ululating sounds.

It was much more pleasant to watch the women carriers walking by on the hard, limestone road. It was the national road on which the porteuses transported baskets of provisions, back and forth, from Saint Pierre and the other cities of Martinique. They went in couples singing and chattering over the lonely highway. They never failed to turn to the white strangers with their charming and musical greeting, "*Bonjou', Missie.*"

There were two returning to Saint Pierre. They never swung their shoulders. Their torsos were immobile. Only the folds of their garments undulated with a sinuous charm

as they walked by with free, full stride. Where had Gauguin seen them before? Of course, they were the Greek dancers of Praxiteles in the Louvre. The world of the primitive! It seemed as if he were in Attica with its terra cotta houses and flowing robes. A bitter-sweet emotion overwhelmed him — regret that the charming simplicity of ancient Greece existed no more, yet grateful that the beauty of a past day seemed to live again before his eyes.

Laval understood him.

"They are beautiful, Paul!"

"Beautiful and strong and happy. I feel old and decrepit beside them."

"Let's call them over. We can buy some fruit."

Laval whistled and waved his hand. They turned around, laughed happily, and walked up the embankment to the two men.

"Dechage moin."

They bent forward and the men lifted the heavy baskets from their heads. Their complexion was a peculiar tinge of red. They were mulattoes known as *capresses*, a sensuous glow in their golden flesh, a velvet witchery in their eyes.

Laval felt abashed before their innocent power and unconscious grace. Gauguin picked up a fruit from a basket, and asked bewildered:

"What is this?"

"Apple-bananas."

"And this?"

"Pomme-cannelle."

"Open it for me."

One of the girls removed its scaly covering and Gau-

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guin tasted a delicious yellow custard, spitting out the black seeds that floated in it.

"Miraculous!"

He offered the girl a franc. She shook her head. He took out a second franc. Again she shook her head. Gauguin and Laval looked at each other in puzzlement. The girl, in a serious voice, explained:

"You have eaten my pomme-cannelle. You are my *doudou*."

Doudou was the Martinique French vernacular for sweetheart. Gauguin broke into hilarious laughter. The ingenuousness of it, in contrast to the self-conscious advances of European girls or the cynical hardness of professionals, struck to his heart. He took her hand caressingly, "What is your name?"

"Zephyrine."

And Laval, more shyly, asked the name of the other.

"Marie."

*

AFTER A supper of saltfish stewed in milk, grated cocoanuts made into cakes, and peach mangoes, they sat on the steps beneath the veranda, smoking long, thin Martinique cigars called *bouts*, and silently drank in the weird magic of an equatorial sunset.

The church towers beneath their feet burst into a yellow glow. The sea and the sky turned lilac. In the intense stillness, green lizards with ruby eyes peeked out of odd corners. Black butterflies woke from their sleep and shadowed the dying green savannahs of the cane fields. Burnished flies and beetles shone. Over the broad green

leaves of a balsier, a yellow serpent crawled and disappeared. The palm fronds along the shore swayed a vivid green against an enormous orange sunset. In the next few seconds they broke up into bits of light that sank into the gloom. The darkness rose like an exhalation, shrouding everything to blackness, until the gold and purple tips of the volcano melted into the inky vapor.

The moon rose over the hills, a magnetic silver moon that drew towards it a vast droning of sounds from within the jungle. The chanting of multitudes of tree frogs. The trilling of legions of crickets. The wheezy, bleating sound of myriads of cra-cras. Millions and millions of animal sounds, that seemed in the darkness like a hymn of despair at the mortality of life to the two northern strangers.

They could not keep their eyes off the jungle with its fascinating goblin shapes of twisted roots and swaying vines. Even more ghastly were the countless fireflies that lighted up the ylang-ylang trees, revealing, in their dance of light, giant fingers opening and closing over enormous, moving spiders.

They were thankfully relieved when Zephyrine and Marie pushed open the gate, and lifted lanterns to seek out their new *doudoux*. Suddenly Zephyrine uttered a frightened shriek. Gauguin sprang down the steps and saw a crab crossing the path of Zephyrine. It was a Through-My-Fault crab, limping along on its small claw, while it held its large claw penitentially folded against its body. Gauguin lifted it carefully, laughed easily to reassure Zephyrine and flung it away.

Zephyrine was struck dumb with horror. When she regained her voice, it was to moan out:

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"You touched it. You touched it. There will be death. There will be death."

Gauguin shivered. Marie shook her head sorrowfully.

"It is true. The Through-My-Fault crab prays to the good Virgin. To touch it is forbidden."

Laval laughed mockingly, more to hide his forebodings than to reassure the girls.

"You musn't believe everything you hear. Come, let's sit down here." Marie felt sorry for Laval.

"There is much you must still learn. Don't you know that if you sit upon the door step, you will take the pain of all who pass by."

They extinguished the lanterns for a multitude of insects were already attracted to them. They quickly ran into the screened veranda. The only light came from a little wick floating in olive oil in a tiny glass. It flickered dimly upon a statuette of the Virgin. Both Marie and Zephyrine bent their heads in silent prayer before it, their hands over a bit of black cloth, hanging from their necks by a string. The black cloth concealed three grains of corn and a bit of camphor to protect them against the small-pox.

There was a silence when they sat down on the two rockers, the Martiniquan *capresses* nestling against their *doudoux*. Laval broke the silence, caressing Marie and speaking.

"You're a little deviless, scaring us with your funny stories."

"The stories are true and you mustn't call me a deviless. The deviless took my Maka away."

"Your Maka?"

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"Yes, Maka was my *doudou*. One day he went away. I never saw him again."

And Marie told the legend of the Deviless who takes the form of a beautiful girl. She waits for the hush of an azure noon and then walks through a plantation, luring the youngest man to follow her. The older men know her as the Evil One, but despite their warning, the youngest man is so inflamed that he follows her blindly. Lured on by her chant and provocative smile, he follows her through jungled valleys and up hills until she reaches the great precipice. Then she turns to him with a burst of hideous laughter, "Kiss me now." Too late, he realizes she is the nameless one and recoils back in horror, lurching backward over the precipice, to his death.

Laval is skeptical.

"So you think it was the Deviless who took your Maka away? Perhaps your Maka sailed away to Panama."

Marie was hurt and would not answer him. Zephyrine turned to Laval angrily.

"You mustn't talk like that. Only Protestants talk that way. If you don't watch out a Zombi will get you."

"What are Zombis?" Gauguin asked.

And Zephyrine spoke of the Zombis—huge distorted animals or men who are sent by witches or wizards to torment disbelievers. They must not be touched, however, for they might be the souls of friends, possessed by the Devil from sunset to sunrise. Once she hit a Zombi over the eye and the next day she found her friend Coraline with a bandage around her eye.

And stories followed of magic sticks that could inflict pain by a mere touch, of certain ancient Holy Ones, who

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could foretell the future, provided they were well paid, of Rainmakers who could bring the rain down on one plantation without raining on another.

And placing one arm more tightly around Gauguin's neck, Zephyrine spoke of the Trionocephalus—the deadly serpent, that infested the roads late at night and that made it impossible, she whispered, for her to go home now.

*

THERE CAME a Sunday afternoon when the two painters heard the rolling rise and fall of a drum from afar. Echoing and re-echoing over the valleys it created an extraordinary tremor in the atmosphere, a palpable vibrancy that stirred the senses strangely. It seemed to Gauguin that an ancestral instinct woke within him telling him to let himself loose on a wild rampage. Folding his easel, he said to Laval:

“Let's do the Tom Tom.”

“We're almost finished. Wait another hour.”

“The devil! Haven't you any feelings? How can you paint with this maddening drum in your ears?”

Gauguin always had his way and, within a half hour, they passed the fortresslike antiquated mansion of a neighboring plantation and walked down hill to the humble shacks of the natives at the edge of a cane field. In a clearing by a river side, the negroes, stripped to the waist, twirled heavy sticks in a mock fight. A drummer, straddling his *k'a*, banged away on it as if possessed, using his hands and feet with an amazing rapidity and dexterity.

In one sonorous voice the negroes roared:

“Make it mad.”

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The drummer beat more frantically.

"Make it crazy."

The drum rumbled deep and low, then high and shrill.

"Make it talk."

The drum moaned, then became jubilant and as suddenly funereal. The sticks hit at each other viciously, the feet skated forward and backward intricately. With all their dancing, and chanting and pounding the negroes seemed tireless.

The mulatto women seated on tree stumps before their shanties were busy filling jugs with tafia from huge barrels. They crooned a song among themselves:

*"Dost thou remember when our pillows lay close
together*

How we told each other all that our hearts thought?"

From time to time a dancer broke away to get his swallow of tafia, so as to heat his blood to a still wilder exuberance.

One mulatto woman motioned to the white men to drink from their jugs. The drum-beat had already maddened Gauguin and the tafia made him hot with excitement. He lifted two sticks from a pile and, giving one to Laval, shouted:

"Save yourself, Charlie, or I'll crack your skull open."

Laval did his best to dance and duel with his stick, but Gauguin was going at him with such insanity that he ran. In a pitch of frenzy, Gauguin pushed by among the

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negroes and found himself duelling with two at a time. The natives shouted gleefully as they watched the "white devil."

It was the first time that Laval saw Gauguin tear loose and it frightened him. He thought the drunken negroes would charge upon Gauguin and beat him to death. But the "white devil" was holding his own and even pushing the negro back, to the immense delight of the onlookers. But he did not have the vitality to keep it up long. In ten minutes he was reeling and Laval had to drag him away to prevent him from collapsing at his feet.

"What's the matter, Paul? Have you gone mad?"

Panting heavily, Gauguin found his voice with difficulty. "No, I've gone native—and it's the life—it's the life, I tell you."

Short of breath, Gauguin walked home with Laval, his brain sensitized to a clairvoyant pitch by the tafia and the excitement. They passed a coffin carried on the heads of black men—a victim of the small-pox, smelling pungently of quicklime, with which the body was covered. Behind the coffin were women crying aloud in terrible, heartrending sobs. All the way home a wheel of melancholic impressions circled in Gauguin's brain. The wailing of the mourners, the threatening tremor of the distant drum, the complaining letter he received from Mette the week before, the song of the mulatto woman that recalled a Mette of long ago:

*"Dost thou remember when our pillows lay close
together
How we told each other all that our hearts thought?"*

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of Clovis and himself scattered like vagrant seeds far away from the mother tree, of Zephyrine's cry, "There will be death."

*

THE NEXT morning Gauguin received a letter from Mette, which told of the death of Clovis. Only the father did not walk behind his little coffin.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANTS AND THE LOCUSTS

GAUGUIN NEVER left his canvas during the following month. The tropic sun enervated Laval, but it released a secret source of energy in his friend. Clovis was dead. That black pall, like the black butterflies that shadowed the cane fields at sunset, hovered over Gauguin as if to blot him out forever. But the great Sun was an omnipotent God of life, breathing energy and desire in the crushed, cold, soul-sickness of a mourning father. He put all his weakening strength into his prayer to the Sun. Like an Aztec priest, he plucked out his own heart to smear its redness of blood and life upon a gray canvas.

Nature sang to him and through him onto a brush that blazed with a new message — that foreshadowed a new school of art.

The mulattoes, with their richly colored dresses, walking with their baskets, of yellow, green, and purple fruits. Other mulattoes sitting and eating the fruits. Emerald trees rising towards the sun. Blue sea, orange sky. He painted them all as a living cycle of Nature, producing and consuming. He called his picture the "Ants and the Locusts."

Laval was enthusiastic.

"There you have it, Paul! That's a Gauguin unmistakably. Only Gauguin could have painted it."

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In his moment of triumph, Gauguin felt sad.

"Yes, I've found myself, but I am thirty-nine."

Zephyrine was neglected during these hectic days. He had time only for a passing nod, as she walked by with her basket of provisions in the morning. She accepted it stoically, as she accepted all things.

"Crazy ants are not so crazy. They are in a hurry because they are in a hurry."

But Marie, who took things more to heart, was worried.

"It is dangerous to work so hard under the sun." It never occurred to her that the fifty miles she walked every day with a hundred-and-fifty-pound basket on her head would have broken the backs of Gauguin and Laval. She looked upon the whites as fragile creatures, who were not born to bear the burdens of the black race.

Laval, a dozen years younger than Gauguin, had not yet acquired the toughness that could resist the devouring tropic heat. At first he felt a soft temptation to idle the hours away in a beatific indolence. But the pleasant languor of the first few weeks did not last long. There was a sensation of weight on his brain that compelled frequent repose. The lifting of a paint brush provoked a perspiration profuse enough to soak him through. Even at night the idea of sleeping under the least covering was torture. He had difficulty in breathing. There was a perceptible quickening of his heart.

Even his mind seemed to slumber. The memories of France, of home, became vague as if they had never existed. He could not read. He preferred to let his mind become enveloped by hazy dreams. He found himself dozing over



Paul Gauguin
Les Cirales et les Fourmis

THE LOCUSTS AND THE ANTS

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his painting. He would start up to see the natives walk by on the glaring limestone road with an animal zest that amazed him. Their skin looked cool, like bodies of snakes or lizards.

The dream stage passed on to an increasing irritation against the prodigious light. The blue sky-fire seemed to burn into his brain like a red furnace. All his vital forces seemed to have evaporated. One night the heat left his body. He shivered. The slightest current of air shocked him like a dash of cold water. He was stricken with malaria.

The gauntness of his sick friend sent a shiver of fear through Gauguin. He remembered the fatal words of a ditch digger in Panama, whose comrade was struck down with the yellow fever.

"If he dies, I will meet him in Hell two weeks later." And two weeks later both were buried side by side in a newly cleared cemetery.

Gauguin had made his prayer to the sun. The chilly earth now called to him and he resigned himself to death. Shaking with fever, he prepared Mette for the worst.

"My poor Mette, I regret that I'm not dead. It seems that since I left Copenhagen, every evil has fallen on us. But it is fated, for nothing good can come from a family that is separated."

All the kindness, and the genuine concern of simple souls were brought out by the sickness of the two men. Were they not different from the other whites, who were proud, and cold and domineering? Did they not seek sanctuary in their colony from the mercenary cruelty of white masters? There was the sympathy between them of a persecuted

people. The gentle blacks chipped their few sous together to buy poule-epi-diri — chicken cooked with rice, the rarest delicacy of the poor in Martinique. When the medicine that the doctor prescribed seemed to do no good, they climbed into the woods infested with fatal serpents to bring back rare, medicinal herbs. They tried all their own arts when others failed, persisting with the faith of children.

Marie and Zephyrine, after an exhausting day of work, spent sleepless nights by the fevered men's bedside. They brought with them the flowers for the sick whites. The yellow, red and green Qui Vivra Verra — "Who will live will see." The green and gold Qui Mourra Saurra — "Who will die will know."

With tense, brooding eyes Marie watched over Laval, placing her cool hands on his feverish brow.

"You will get well, my *doudou*; The Holy One has told me."

Zephyrine, crying softly before the Chapel of the Virgin, prayed, "Guardian Angel, watch over him, have pity upon his weakness, follow him whithersoever he go."

The good Virgin spared Laval and Gauguin and they spent weeks convalescing on the veranda. Their gaunt faces were filled out little by little by meals of manioc flour and dried codfish. Their money was almost gone. Their mulatto friends were living on a franc a day. To them the spending of a sou took on vast proportions. The old, carefree days of slavery were gone. Instead they were citizens of Martinique with the privilege of working twelve hours a day or starving.

The wet season was beginning. There was a continual

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pouring of rain. The air was heavy with vegetal scents, savage sweet. Wild high winds ruffled through the cane of the mountain slopes in storms of papery sound. The forest depths were eternally dripping raindrops—a monotonous weeping of tears. In the silence of the veranda, Marie would say:

“Do not think so much. It is thinking that makes men old.”

But Gauguin would reply:

“I am only thinking how kind all of you are. In my country, it is hard to be kind.”

Zephyrine was alarmed.

“Your country. This is your country. A dog has four legs but he can’t take four roads. You will stay here for all the time.”

Laval explained:

“We must go back to our country to make money. Then we will come back.”

Marie’s face was a mask of tragedy.

“All *doudoux* are alike. They come—they go; they never stay.”

Laval pleaded:

“But how can we stay? We cannot eat codfish and manioc flour all the time. Our stomachs are sick already.”

Marie nodded sadly.

“There is food for almost nothing and people are starving here in Martinique. It is strange.”

Laval could only answer:

“Believe me, Marie, I will come back to you.”

Marie was visibly cold.

"No, you will catch a wasp in France and you will never come back."

Laval smiled wanly. Catch a wasp in France? Who would marry a penniless artist? He felt pathetically alone. Gauguin would go back to his wife. He knew he loved his wife, even if he spoke little of her. What had he to go back to in Paris? Starvation and loneliness. But to stay in Martinique was suicide. And now, Marie was cold to him. Once again he felt detached from life. It was easy, nothing gained, nothing lost, to take his own life.

Zephyrine spoke sharply to Gauguin.

"You want to go back because you have a *doudou* there."

Gauguin would not answer. Mette, his *doudou*! What sort of *doudou* was she that he had to write to her the week before:

"Of all the evil you have caused me, that of your silence is the most painful. I am going to arrive in France, devoured by fever and worry."

And yet her infrequent letters, when they did arrive, spoke eloquently between the lines of her need for him. Poor Mette! Neither the love of her sisters nor the love of her mother could compensate for the loss of her husband. He had written her that day in a tender mood:

"In a little while, my dear, I will embrace you and I will love you."

Zephyrine pushed up the bright end of her turban like a red plume, unknowingly provocative. She slipped an arm around the silent Gauguin, and consoled herself.

"This is a land of the *revenant*. You will come back.

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You are not like other white men. You belong to us. You will come back to the country of the sun."

*

THAT NIGHT Laval tried to kill himself. Gaugin snatched from him a glittering machete.

"Not yet, old boy.... Our career has only begun...."

CHAPTER X

A PRODIGAL FATHER

A YEAR MAY be an eternity, or it may be a yesterday. While in the burning sunlit lands time was infinitely long, but back in familiar Paris, it seemed to Gauguin he had left it the day before. It was true the Opéra Comique had burned down and there was a new President in France, but the music of Wagner was still hissed everywhere and the Impressionists were still accused of having "some hitherto unknown disease of the eye."

Paris was as frivolous as ever. Even politics was a comic affair. Workers drank their noonday wine singing a monarchical song for the dictatorship of General Boulanger, the hero of the Franco-Prussian War:

*"C'est Boulanger, lange, lange;
C'est Boulanger qu'il nous faut!"*

Crowds went to the Autumn Salon in the Palace of Industry as if to a picnic. A scene from a favorite opera caused the humming of a favorite air. A religious painting provoked the singing of hymns in falsetto. The painting of a dog was cause enough for barking, of a donkey for braying, of a lion for roaring. An artist rushed by with an empty frame and a loud comment was heard, "What air in that painting!" A hunting scene inspired a group of students to imitate the sound of a horn and to strike up the hallali of

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huntsmen in full pursuit. Before a painting of two goddesses kissing, all pretend to be frightfully shocked.

The king of Baroda arrived from India with his harem of twenty favorites, forty servants and six hundred trunks. Laval and Gauguin arrived with bronzed and emaciated faces after working their way over from Martinique as ordinary seamen on a tramp sailboat. Their bellies were being eaten away by dysentery and they had not a sou between them.

An empty stomach was not conducive to an emotional scene. They shook hands and parted, Laval for his paternal home, Gauguin for the home of Schuffenecker.

"Mon Dieu, my poor Gauguin, you look as if you could put away twenty meals and never feel it."

Schuffenecker spoke truthfully. Gauguin did put away twenty meals but he felt the pains of dysentery more acutely than ever. Like Prometheus who brought fire to the earth and was punished by the Gods with a vulture eating at his intestines, Gauguin brought the hot color to Modern Art only at the price of intestinal agony.

However, Schuffenecker's enthusiasm for his Martinique paintings was a blessed soothing syrup.

"You are a great painter. I drink to the Gauguin of the Negresses."

The toast of Schuffenecker was not a mockery to Gauguin. He accepted it as his true worth. He was nearly forty, a beggar, ignored by the world of Art, except for a few pioneers seeking new sensations. But it was those few who mattered. He knew that it depended upon him and a half dozen others to thrust out mysterious tentacles into depths never reached before and bring forth either horrors or new shivers of delight. He had no doubt that the world in time would experience the shudder of delight from his

canvases. It was this conviction of genius, aggravated by a distressing poverty, that brought out in him a fanatical pride in himself and his work. Otherwise, he would be overwhelmed by despair at the almost solid indifference of a world at ease.

He accepted the hospitality of Schuffenecker almost as his due. In his theory of morals society owed him a living. But however Gauguin fortified himself with such reasoning, a fierce independence made him suffer pangs of shame in accepting charity. Morbidly sensitive, he felt that Schuffenecker considered him a necessary evil, a sort of poor relation for whom he had to provide out of ordinary decency.

Schuffenecker never suspected Gauguin's resentment against him. He felt a naïve pleasure, almost a sense of glory, in being able to help a man whom he recognized as a great painter. He considered Gauguin's Martinique paintings as something absolutely new on the horizon. "Lazy Negresses," "Busy Negresses," "The Ants and the Locusts" — compositions of luxuriant colors, of fresh, primitive vitality.

He knew an open-minded American buyer who purchased the works of the radical artists, as a good financial investment, knowing that the radicals of yesterday would be the conservatives of tomorrow. When Schuffenecker brought the American to the studio, Gauguin was away. However, he took the canvases from the corner and displayed them on the easel. "The Ants and the Locusts" brought the first spark of interest.

"That's not bad!"

"Not bad! It's a masterpiece. One of these days it will be hung in the museum. Ask Degas. Ask Pissarro what they think of a Gauguin. They swear by him."

"You know five hundred francs is my limit."

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Gauguin at this moment entered the studio. His face flushed red. So Schuffenecker was trying to sell his paintings behind his back, so as to be repaid for his charity, no doubt! What did he think he was, a clown, whose painting could entertain his friends. Of course, a beggar had no right to expect any privacy. His words sputtered out of him.

"What! Talk about selling my work while I am gone. I'll say that's taking advantage of a man's confidence. Get to —."

Gauguin shoved the American out. Schuffenecker gaped at him, stupefied. Without a word, Gauguin took him by the shoulders and thrust him out, banging the door and locking it with an emphatic click.

Schuffenecker pleaded outside.

"But, Paul, you don't understand. The gentleman wants to buy your painting."

Gauguin kept silent. The two men walked away. Gauguin clenched his fists to control his rage. What a humiliation! What a curse to be a beggar! Laval was right. If things become impossible it is best to take one's life.

He remained in his studio two days, suffering pangs of hunger, deaf to the pleadings of Schuffenecker. Finally, the owner demanded to be let into his own studio. A pale and haggard Gauguin unlocked the door. But it was Schuffenecker who was apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Paul. I know how it is. A man away from his family is only half a man. Go to see them."

With these words, he put a roll of bills on the table and left the studio. Gauguin fingered the bills hungrily. Mette, Emile, Aline! He could not wait another moment. He packed his valise hurriedly and without saying goodbye to Schuffenecker, rushed to the Gare du Nord to get the first

train to Copenhagen. At last he would see his beloved ones again. He had no appetite for food, in this greater appetite for the love of his own.

When he stepped off the train, the good people of Denmark stared at this dusty and unkempt stranger. His light-striped trousers and long frock coat edged with Breton knit work frayed at the sides, gave him a freakish appearance. Mette, herself, opened the door and stared, frozen with surprise and nervousness.

"Mette, dear one!"

He hugged her tightly and like a big baby could not stop his eyes from dimming. Mette kissed him but she held herself in check. Her mother was behind her, the mother who told her over and over again she must dismiss Gauguin from her life, for he would never amount to anything. Mechanically, Gauguin shook the cold hand of his mother-in-law.

They sat down in the dim light of the stuffy parlor. Mette sat opposite him on a rocker, as if fearful to be too close to him. There seemed to be so little to say. Gauguin rolled a cigarette and lit it nervously, for his mother-in-law objected to smoking in the parlor.

"Mette, how can you keep on living like this? If we must struggle let us struggle together in Paris."

"We won't struggle in Paris. We'll starve."

If only Mette were more optimistic. But her mouth had the tightness of one in whom the last illusion is destroyed forever. Her husband attempted a cheerful answer.

"I am being talked about more and more. Within a year or two at the most I will sell regularly. All I will have to do will be to sign my name to a canvas and sell it for five hundred francs."

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Mette brought him back to the present.

"Why is it so hard to sell your paintings? A man who has been painting for a dozen years ought to be able to sell by that time."

"Why? Why do the rich buy only antique furniture or paintings of cupids and fairies? Because their souls are with the dead or with the fairy tales of their baby days. They are afraid of the living."

The bitterness of Gauguin always blazed out in anger against the rich. It was all the fiercer because it was so impotent. Money made mummies of people. Their sense of importance made them stupid. Everything they did must have a recommendation by the Institute or the sanction of the Academy. The anger that burned in Mette, however, was not against the rich, but against her husband who was too proud to be rich. Her vanity was deeply wounded by the fact that her husband cared infinitely more for his art than he did for her. She even suspected his expressions of love for her. She was beginning to place him in the category of pretentious and unreliable egoists that comprise the male sex. A woman denied love is a bitter woman. A chord of pity was touched in Gauguin to see the robust Mette of his younger days grown thinner and more subdued.

"Be easy with me, Mette. I am in as much of a pit as you are. We are victims of a materialistic society."

"To know that doesn't help things any."

The poison of bitterness had eaten too deeply into her soul. If there were any tenderness and love in her, there was none left for her husband. However she might try to excuse him for his weakness for art, she could never in her heart forgive him for having broken up their home. Gauguin sensed this hostility.

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"What have you against me? You have no bitterness against your brothers. They earn two to four thousand francs a year. Suppose I had the same sort of clerical job as they have. I could never hope for more than five thousand a year, for years to come. That is no future. It is a living death. My art is bound to be recognized. Ask Schuffenecker. Ask Degas. He told me it was bizarre but sacred. It was art incarnate. They all tell me my art is my capital. It will be the future of our children. It will be the honor of the name they bear. Millet starved for many years. Can you say that his children suffer from it? All this bitterness of yours is weakness. Be strong. Believe in me, and I will work with twice the heart."

But Mette's hardness did not relax. Her mother had already warned her not to be taken in by words. She glided into the room as if she had been hiding behind the curtains at the doorway.

"Will you have some tea?"

There was no cordiality in her voice, only a sense of duty.

"No, thank you."

Gauguin glared at her, seeing in her the symbol of the abyss that separated him from his wife.

The children came home from school late in the afternoon. Gauguin heard their voices in the doorway. They were speaking Danish. The sight of their father caught them by surprise. Children of seven, nine and ten, they could not disguise their feelings. There was a sense of awkwardness, a little shame, a little coldness as they kissed him. They had no sense of him as a father. He was a stranger that came to visit their mother. Gauguin in the first flush of seeing them

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embraced and kissed them warmly. He lifted little Jean to the ceiling and patted Emile and Paul on their cheeks.

"Where is Aline?"

Aline, the favorite, Aline whose twelve years had already understood the depths. Aline, for whom his heart yearned more than the others.

"She's helping the teacher. She'll be back soon."

Of course, Aline, the gentle, would be the teacher's pet.

A great shadow hovered about the children. All felt the strain of it, but no one dared mention it. The father had left two years before with Clovis. He returned empty-handed.

Strong, bronzed and square-shouldered as Gauguin was, he felt humble before his children, as if he had deserted them to fate, as if he were asking for mercy.

Mette bustled over them, ordered them to wash themselves, to put their hats away, to wipe their shoes. Her fussiness betrayed to Gauguin his intrusion. The children were Mette's, not his. Mette's easy familiarity with them could never again be his.

She spoke Danish to them. They answered in Danish. When he spoke French to them, they answered shamefacedly in French, as if it were a forbidden language. He couldn't help saying, reproachfully to Mette,

"You have made good little Danes out of them."

"Why not, since France offers them so little?"

Gauguin felt he must be careful. He must not open old wounds, that were still sore and sensitive.

He heard the door to the house open. Aline came in with her books strapped together. She took her hat off absentmindedly, absorbed in revery. Her golden hair, falling in a cloud around her shoulders, gave her face the tender melancholy of a Pietà. She stared at herself in the hall

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mirror, peering in not with a sense of vanity, although she was beautiful, but with a sense of mystery as if she were not of this world. Pale, blonde, and dreamy, the twelve-year-old girl, wise beyond her years, must have felt that she had but a few more years to live. Grave and detached, she rarely smiled.

Gauguin opened the door to the hallway softly. He wanted to greet Aline alone. Aline glanced quickly towards him, shuddered as if at an apparition, then, running to him, she cried adoringly, "Father."

Gauguin held her tightly to him, so tightly that Aline winced with pain.

The news of Gauguin's arrival spread quickly to the Gad family. They all flocked to the house that evening as if to protect their sister from her scoundrel of a husband. However, a voyager home from the sea, has stories to tell, and Gauguin answered their questions with brutal tales of Panama and glowing descriptions of Martinique. But their questions drifted back to Panama.

"How many more years must they dig?"

"I know a man who invested half a million in Panama. He says he'll be worth two million in another two years. What do you say to that?"

Their persistent questioning seemed a crafty device to prevent him from talking about his art. They saw only his threadworn suit, which spoke clearly enough of his failure. With a diabolic perversity they gloried in talking about fortunes, millions, captains of industry as if to remind the poverty-stricken artist of his former prestige as a stockbroker. Ambitious to make money, the Gads were somehow doomed merely to talk about it.

Gauguin bitterly saw under what influence his children

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were being raised — the petty tradesman's ambition of so many thousand a year to achieve respectability. Aline alone, with her far-away eyes amidst the hubbub of talk, sensed the loneliness of her father. How funny grown-up people were, always hiding their real feelings from each other. Gauguin read her thought.

"Come, Aline, it's time you went to bed. We'll have a real little chat upstairs together."

He took her by the arm, as if she were a lady and marched her up to her bedroom. Mette's sister tapped her head significantly. Gauguin was incurably crack-brained.

Father and daughter sat on the bed holding hands.

"Tell me, Aline, when you grow up, what sort of man will you marry?"

"I will never marry."

"No? Why?"

"Because the man I love is married."

Gauguin suppressed an impulse to break out in loud laughter.

"Who is the man, Aline?"

Aline looked up at her father shyly.

"It's you, Father!"

The father was more shocked than delighted. He embraced her tenderly.

"Why do you love me, Aline?"

"Because you're like Pierre Loti. You go all over the world. He writes books, but you paint pictures." Suddenly she gripped the arm of her father.

"Take me away with you — to Panama and Martinique?"

"But what will you do there while I'm painting pictures all day?"

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"I want to paint, too. I want to paint the clouds and the sky and the green pine trees."

The other children might be Mette's, but Aline was his. The blood of the romantic Gauguins, of Flora Tristan, was coursing in her.

"What color would you paint the green pine trees?"

"I'd paint it in all colors like as if it were on fire."

The Gauguin imagination! She was truly his. He took her in his arms and rocked her.

"Some day, I'll take you away, Aline. And remember all the painting I do from now on will be for you, for you alone."

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WHEN BEDTIME came, his mother-in-law led him stiffly to the guest room. And while taking Mette to her own room, Gauguin overheard her say:

"We can't afford to have God bless you with another child."

CHAPTER XI

VAN GOGH

AT THE age of twenty Vincent Van Gogh was well satisfied with his position as art dealer for the firm of Goupil in London.

"This is a fine business. The longer one is here the more ambitious one is to do well."

He bought himself a top hat and walked to his shop in Southampton Street full of hope for the future. The moodiness and shyness of his adolescence when he buried himself in books or roamed alone through the barren country-side of Holland, seemed to disappear amidst the bustle and matter-of-factness of the London business world. The only thorn was his love for Ursula, his landlady's daughter, and the charming manager of a doll shop. The intensity of his passion made his proposal to her very awkward.

"Don't be silly. I'm already engaged to be married."

Vincent felt the world flounder at his feet. To console himself, he read more deeply into philosophy and theology. Renan's words burned into his soul:

"A man is not here below to be happy, nor is he here to be simply honest. He must acquire nobility and overcome the vulgarity in which the majority of individuals drag out an existence."

A little later he was transferred to Goupil's in Paris. The pleasures of the flesh were as trivial vanities to him.

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A terrible obsession in him clouded out the world of the senses. In the solitude of his room, Bible in hand, he made a tortured pilgrimage through the world of ideas. What was the meaning of life? He needed a definite ideal, or else he would be a monster in his misery. At last he saw the light.

"Let us sacrifice ourselves; let us live for others and be useful to our fellow creatures."

The placid satisfaction on the faces of his rich clients at Goupil's enrages him. His own misery drew him to the misery of others. Returning to London, he assisted a Methodist minister as a missionary to the poor. Face to face with misery, his soul was exalted. He went to Catholic Churches, Synagogues, Salvation Army services. A burning fever was in him to cleanse himself of all worldly desires. Once when a collection plate was held out to him, he threw into it his gold watch and his gloves. He had found his mission in life. It was to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to the dark lives of miserable workers.

To become a minister like his father, Vincent needed two years of study in a theological school. But what had dead languages to do with the spreading of the living faith? After a year's desperate struggle he threw away his Greek and Latin grammars, and on his own responsibility went to preach the gospel to the miners of Belgium. *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens, describing the horrors of miners, had shaken him to the depths. He determined to be poorer than the poor. He made a shirt out of a packing sack. He ate only rice, molasses syrup and bread. He slept in a basement on a straw-filled sack. He blackened his face with coal, so as not to appear any different from the miners. Preaching alone could not satisfy his passion for self-sacrifice. He de-

voted all his spare time drawing the humble of the earth, that mankind's conscience might be stricken by appalling canvases of cadaverous and ugly diggers of coal.

After two years of self-immolation, his religious hysteria passed away. He had come to know his fellow-evangelists a little better. He saw them as acquisitive schemers eager for a safe berth, while they looked upon him as a vain-glorious madman, who pretended to the goodness of a St. Francis. Vincent began to suspect the helpfulness of preaching. He saw only too clearly that what the miners needed was not the words of the Bible but more money.

He returned to his father's home, his old faith in Evangelism gone, but with a new faith in art. He was twenty-eight, incapable of earning a living, with the queer enthusiasms and the impulsive moods of a man who is still drifting about for a place in society. Sex-starved, he fell in love with the first woman who listened to him sympathetically. She was his first cousin, a widow with a child. He babbled his love to her. "No! Never!" she replied and left town the following day. He wrote her letter after letter, but, in vain. His father was shocked at what he considered his son's incestuous love for his first cousin.

Frustrated in love for the second time, Vincent suffered frightful humiliation. He felt nothing could be too low for him. He embraced vice in a torment of self-infliction. He read a sentence from Michelet:

"How is it that there can be one woman on this earth alone and deserted." He married a diseased and alcoholic prostitute with five children. The evangelistic spirit was still with him. He meant to reform her.

The scandal was too much for the family. They gave him up as lost. Only one man was faithful to him, his

brother, Theodore. Theo, as Vincent called him, visited him in Holland and saw that his union with Siem, the prostitute, was impossible. At Theo's insistence, Vincent left his wife and wandered through the bogs and moors in North-eastern Holland. He felt his mind giving way and, like a frightened child, returned, a prodigal son, to his father.

For the third time he fell in love with a neighbor and was repulsed. Was he so impossible that only a prostitute would have him? But there was a fire in him that burned away despair. He wrote to Theo:

"Even if I fall ninety-nine times, the hundredth time I shall rise once more."

Nothing in life was left to him but his art, and he pursued it with the fury of a drowning man.

"One must create quickly, quickly in haste like the reaper who in the blaze of the sun is silent and thinks of nothing but his work."

He did not realize that the tension within him was the hereditary taint of epilepsy that would one day attack him. Already, there were signs pointing in that direction. His cousin, Anton Mauve, who earned a comfortable living painting cows and sheep, offered to teach him drawing. He placed a head of Apollo before him. To Vincent, a plaster cast was to painting what dead languages were to his religion. With impulsive disgust he smashed Apollo to the ground and fled from the studio never to return.

Later, when studying in Belgium under Verlat, he amazed the students by painting with a board instead of a palette, applying the paint so thickly that it dripped from the canvas. He was sent to the drawing class to copy a Venus de Milo. He deformed the Venus by purposefully broadening her hips. His enraged teacher narrowed the hips

to mathematical exactness. Vincent almost spat on the corrected drawing. Then, gesturing wildly, he cried out:

"Don't you know that a woman must have hips, buttocks and a pelvis that will hold a child?"

He could not remain in one place more than a few months. Always impatient to escape, he knew not from what, he knew not where. When he was thirty-three he lived with his brother Theo in Paris. The calm, orderly Theo soon found his living quarters as disordered as Vincent's mind. What was worse, Vincent was forever flying into violent passions. He could stand no criticism. He would listen to no reason. He alone knew the meaning of life and the absolute theory of art. Theo was puzzled. Why these frantic defenses? But he was patient with Vincent, for he loved his brother dearly.

Through Theo, Vincent met Signac, the exponent of Pointillism. Vincent found it impossible to daub his canvas with spots. In his mania for speed, he lengthened the dots to small swirling lines. Signac laughed and called them exploded dots. Vincent himself exploded, and, painting his sleeves with dots, raved about the diseased imagination that sees Nature ridden with dots of small-pox.

Another day in Guillaumin's studio, Vincent angrily denounced Guillaumin for falsifying workmen in his painting. "This is the way workmen shovel sand," and Vincent took off his coat, seized an imaginary shovel and shoveled imaginary sand with a vengeance.

"He is droll!" people used to say.

Vincent was sorely in need of the quiescent world of Nature. The tempo of the city excited him to excesses. He drank too much and, with Lautrec, indulged too often in follies of vice. Theo was helpless. If he pleaded with his

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older brother, Vincent broke into a wild rage and swore he would not accept another penny. Vincent began to look like an invalid and was rapidly becoming an habitual drunkard.

Theo was the agent for the painters of the Petit Boulevard, as the Neo-Impressionists styled themselves. The painters of the Grand Boulevard, the Impressionists, were too prosperous under the régime of Durand Ruel to give a helping hand to their struggling juniors. Theo, alone, cornered the clients of Valadon and Boussod and led them to a small entresol where the paintings of Seurat, Signac, Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Gauguin shone in unappreciated glory. But most of the clients were suspicious of the entresol. They felt more secure in the large gallery.

One day Schuffenecker came with a very special purpose to see the manager of Valadon and Boussod.

"I want to speak to you about Gauguin. You know he is doing ceramic work for Chapelet — crude figures — you'd think a child modelled them — but very powerful. Of course, they're too good to sell and Gauguin is still down on his luck. Can't you let him have a one-man exhibition of his work from Martinique? All he needs is a little réclame."

Theo listened sympathetically and finally agreed on the terms. Programmes were printed, invitations were sent out, and a flock of critics saw the complete work of Gauguin of the negresses for the first time. But there was something in Gauguin that seemed to repel most of the critics. They didn't know how to pigeon-hole him. They decided that his paints were too violaceous and dark. Pissarro came to his defense and said that in hot countries, the forms are eaten away by light, that nuances do not exist. But the ex-



In the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Dale

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hibition was a failure. The few amateurs who bought his Brittany work deserted him in his Martinique paintings.

Gauguin puffed at his clay pipe calmly. He turned to Vincent and said:

"The critics are blind to the tropics because they've never been there. If I had the money I'd go to Madagascar or Tonkin or back to Martinique. I feel I am myself only under a tropical sun."

The sun — the sun — that was what he needed.

The words stuck in Vincent's mind. He had already admired the blinding patchwork of colors that Monticelli threw on his canvases in Marseilles. Why not go to Marseilles, where the sun, at least, was semi-tropical? He packed his bag, and leaving a note for Theo, stepped onto a train bound for the Mediterranean.

Theo was able to sell only two Gauguins, enough to keep Gauguin alive in Pont Aven for a few months. "Armed against all suffering" he left for Brittany. The Gauguin of the Tropics had failed. He must become Gauguin, the melancholy Celt, in order to win back the few buyers of his pictures.

A creature of moods and impulses, Vincent had only to see the ruined Roman amphitheatre in Arles from the window of his train to decide upon that quaint town for his artistic camping ground. Fortunately, there was always Theo, to whom he could send a telegram for money. Although Theo's commissions were negligible, he accepted the responsibility of supporting Vincent without a murmur. For Theo as well as Vincent was profoundly convinced of the words their father preached every Sunday:

"For whoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

Both were too poor to marry and the love they might have otherwise lavished upon their wives, they gave to each other. Vincent often said to Theo that his paintings could never repay for all that Theo did for him. Between them, despite Vincent's temper, was the profound understanding of brothers in blood, brothers in sacrifice, and brothers in rare friendship.

Vincent's first letter to Theo from Arles was all delight for the *doux pays*. There were Arlesian women with quaint headdresses, Zouaves in brilliant red and green uniforms, priests in surplices "looking like dangerous rhinoceroses." Almond-trees in bloom formed long, white tunnels. Oleanders spotted garden fronts. The mistral blew a warm, languorous wind over the country of the vineyards. Cedars and cypresses were livid green spears against the horizon. The sun shed a radiance of pale sulphur, and there was much laughter around the sidewalk tables before the cafés.

Instinctively Vincent found his friends among the humble folk of Arles. The garçon of the café; the grocer; Rollins the postman. They at least need never wound his sense of inferiority with the critical aloofness of genteel ladies and landlords. But he yearned to have a man like Gauguin with him.

He could almost prostrate himself before Gauguin. Only four years his senior, Gauguin had accomplished so much more than he could ever hope. Gauguin had travelled over the world as a sailor, knew the mysteries of high finance, had felt the joy of fatherhood. And with it all, he was a great artist, the leader of the advanced school. Vincent needed a mother spirit to direct him, to soothe his troubled mind. Gauguin with that inborn air of leadership would be just the man to unravel the many puzzles of life for Vincent.

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He wanted Gauguin for a less obvious reason. He had painted his house yellow, so that it should bring light to everyone. Perhaps, the yellow house could be made the center of a society of artists similar to the Pre-Raphaelites in England. Gauguin with his personality could attract the artists in Brittany to come down South with him, and like Christ and the disciples they could all live harmoniously together.

In all his letters to Theo, Vincent kept referring more and more to Gauguin.

"I have had a note from Gauguin. He complains of the bad weather, is still ailing and says that in all the variety of distresses that afflict humanity, nothing maddens him more than the lack of money, and yet he feels himself doomed to perpetual beggary."

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"I COULD quite well share with some one in the new studio, and I should like it. Perhaps Gauguin will come to the South?"

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"I HAVE been thinking about Gauguin, and here it is: If Gauguin was to come here, there is Gauguin's journey, and there are two beds and two mattresses, which in that case we absolutely must buy. But afterwards, as Gauguin is a sailor, we shall probably manage to grub at home. And the two of us will live on the same money that I spend by myself."

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"I BELIEVE in the victory of Gauguin and the other artists, but between then and now is a long time. Meanwhile,

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Gauguin may crash like Meryon, disheartened. It is bad he is not working."

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"I HAVE had a letter from Gauguin who says he has got from you a letter enclosing 50 francs, which touched him greatly. He says that the pain in his bowels still continues, and he seems to me to be very depressed."

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"HE SPEAKS of some hope he has of finding a capital of 600,000 francs, to set up as a dealer for Impressionist pictures. I should not be surprised if this hope is a Fata Morgana, a mirage of destitution. The scheme looks to me simply another proof that he is foundering.

"He says that when sailors have to move a heavy load or raise an anchor, they all sing together to keep them up and give them vim.

"That is just what artists lack."

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"I THINK it would make a tremendous difference to me if Gauguin were here, for now the days pass without my speaking a word to anyone."

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"I CAN see already that Gauguin is hoping for success, he cannot do without Paris. He does not realize the eternity of poverty."

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"I OFTEN get down-hearted. But Gauguin and so many others are in exactly the same position and we must above

all seek the remedy within ourselves, in good will and patience, and struggle at the same time to be something more than mediocrities.

"Enclosed is a letter from Gauguin. It is just a cry of distress. 'I am getting deeper and deeper into debt every day.'

"You offer him hospitality here and accept the only means of payment that he has—his pictures. But if he demands over and above that you should pay his journey, he is going rather too far.

"But his stomach is all wrong and when one's stomach is wrong and one has indigestion, one has no will power."

*

"I HAVE a letter from Gauguin, who seems very unhappy, and says that as soon as he has sold something, he will certainly come, but he still does not make it clear, whether, if he had his fare paid, he would agree to shake himself free and come.

"He says that the people where he lodges are and have been wonderful to him, that to leave them like that would be an outrage. But that I would be turning a knife in his heart if I were to think he would not come straight off if he could. And he says that if you could sell his pictures at a low price he would be quite content."

*

"I HAVE just received the portrait of Gauguin by himself. It gave me the impression of its representing a prisoner. Not a shadow of gayety. Not the slightest relief of flesh, the flesh in the shadows is a dismal blue. What Gauguin's portrait says to me above everything, is that he must not go

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on like this, he must become again the richer Gauguin of the negresses."

*

THE LAST letter before the arrival of Gauguin has a strange undercurrent of premonition.

"As a matter of fact I am pretty nearly reduced again to the madness of Hugo van der Goes in the picture by Emil Wauters. Yet even then I do not think that my madness could take the form of prosecution, since my feelings when in a state of excitement lead me rather to the consideration of eternity and eternal life.

"But in any case I must beware of my nerves."

Theo was finally able to sell one of Gauguin's Brittany paintings for five hundred francs. At last, Gauguin could pay his debts and bid farewell to Bernard and Laval in Pont Aven. His two friends promised to follow him and in all their minds was the hope of a communistic society of painters in Arles.

Gauguin arrived in Arles so early in the morning that he thought it best to wait for the dawn in the Café de la Gare, the Café Vincent painted so often.

"Ah, you are the *copain* of Vincent Van Gogh!"

The patron of the Café explained that Vincent spoke of him so often that he recognized Gauguin immediately. Gauguin felt uncomfortable at the idea of Vincent's hero-worshipping. It detracted from Vincent's greatness as an artist.

The gas lights lent a ghastly air to the interior with its bare walls and tables. There was a subterranean gloom about the place: a fit setting for a murder.

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Gauguin sat at a corner table in a dour mood. The cruel dysentery from which he suffered for so many months in Pont Aven left him with a cynical hardness that made laughter difficult. His goal seemed farther away than ever. How wonderful it might have been had his exhibition been a success—with money in his pocket, he would be in Arles looking for a home for Mette and the little ones.

Instead, he was accepting the charity of the rough and noisy brother of Theo. Of course, Vincent had a heart of gold. That was the rub! Vincent belonged to the people. Vincent was always at ease among the *sans culottes*, while he was at bottom an aristocrat. The Borgia blood. Then again Vincent was so nervous. Luckily he had his own nerves under iron control. If Vincent could keep his place, they'd make a go of it. Otherwise—

The first customer of the day came just after dawn. His angular head was covered with red hair. Small eyes glittered below his sloping peaked forehead. His cheek bones protruded. His contracted lips gave his face a sullen, rude expression. However, he greeted the *patron* in a loud, sonorous voice that radiated a peasant-like good fellowship.

"Alors, mon vieux, comment ça va, ce matin!"

The *patron* jerked his head towards the corner where Gauguin was seated. Vincent wheeled around.

"Gauguin!"

Gauguin rose, smiling broadly, his gloomy thoughts dissipated by the fresh breeze in Vincent's voice. Vincent ran to him, embraced him, patted him on the shoulder and walked about him in wild delight. So intense was his joy that the avalanche of words could not pass his lips. He looked like a rough fox terrier, skipping about, but, alas, with no tail to express his ecstasy. Gauguin finally said:

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"Well, here I am, after all!"

At last Vincent found his voice.

"Here you are. Here we both are. That's the way it should be." He turned to the *patron*.

"*Deux rhum Américains!* As you say, my dear Gauguin, we should begin the day with a blow of the fist."

CHAPTER XII

L'HOMME À L'OREILLE COUPÉ

VINCENT PAINTED an orderly decorative pattern of vivid sunflowers between pictures, on the wall of his bedroom, but it was the only orderly thing he did. His paint-box, crowded with tubes, was in disarray, the dishes were unwashed in the sink, clothes lay scattered on beds and chairs, and the money in Vincent's pocket was a tangled ball of bills. Gauguin had to take matters in charge from the first day.

"Look here, Vincent, just because I rave against civilization doesn't mean I want to live indecently. We'll have to do things with a system. You wash the dishes and I'll wipe them and sweep the floor. You buy the food and I will cook it. Put the money in a cigar box. We'll spend so much for rent, so much for food, so much for tobacco and as for distractions, we'll take what we'll need, and write it down on a slip of paper. You're spending too much money on canvases, on frames, on paint. We can cut our own frames and buy paint by bulk and pound it. Follow a system and we'll have more time for our art."

Vincent obeyed humbly. At last he had the leadership he needed. He was such a helpless victim of his moods. There were lyrical bursts of violence and love in him, while in Gauguin there was the pretentious calm of an Olympian.

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The difference in their temperament was the difference in their painting. Vincent painted what he saw in short, quick jabs, a pizzicatti rhythm of intense excitement. Gauguin took his time, brooded over a landscape, twisted and bent his figures to fit them into a decorative pattern. Leisurely, round strokes like solemn organ-tones.

The two artists sensed their difference so keenly that they were afraid to talk of their work, dreading to wound each other. At last Vincent bluntly asked for a criticism.

Gauguin hesitated. He must be careful with Vincent. But Vincent's stubborn attitude was so provocative of a fight.

"Your sunflowers are fine. They are better than Monet's. But there is something missing in your landscapes — the sound of a trumpet. You're too impetuous. You paint without thinking. You should have broader planes, brighter colors. Don't copy Nature so much."

Vincent was puzzled, then he became angry.

"What is wrong with copying Nature? You look down on Nature just because you dare not face it."

Just like Vincent to answer a criticism with a violent accusation.

"You don't understand. What is Nature? For a hundred years artists have been painting Nature a certain way, and everybody cries — Ah, this is Nature. But Nature imitates art. We must paint Nature in a more imaginative way and people, in time, will begin to say — Ah, that is Nature."

Vincent was not entirely convinced but his next painting was done in broader planes. Gauguin, however, was unconsciously learning from Vincent. He began to use his violent colors. He had been painting angels in Pont Aven, but the sun in Arles was too sensuous for religious subjects.

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He painted a nude woman lying on the hay surrounded by pigs.

Vincent admired the painting. Homely subjects always struck a sympathetic chord in him. The woman was a peasant. He loved her. And he loved the gluttonous little pigs. Somehow this farmyard picture reminded him of Millet. Gauguin was insulted.

"Millet! Millet was no artist. He was just a popular illustrator of sentimental virtues."

Vincent was furious. Millet the kind, Millet the good, Millet the wonderful painter of the Angelus. Millet had a message of peace and love for all mankind. Gauguin shrugged his shoulders.

"The only message of an artist should be the message of beauty."

"Beauty? What is Beauty? Perhaps Meissonier was no artist? And Ziem?" Gauguin could not help laughing uproariously.

"You belong with Degas and Cézanne and you talk to me of Meissonier and Ziem. Can't you see you're miles away from them?"

Vincent was in a turmoil. Gauguin had such an exasperating way of dictating aesthetic laws as if they were final. He was destroying all his idols in the world of art and leaving nothing in their place. He began a passionate tirade on loving all art, on not being too exclusive. All artists are brothers. None of them should be condemned. All should be admired for even attempting art in this world of hatred and war. Vincent became purple in his anxiety to convince Gauguin.

"You are right, Brigadier!" said Gauguin, for he feared Vincent was about to get an attack of apoplexy.

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Rollins, the postman, loved to have a glass of wine with Vincent and discuss politics. He always toasted his glass to Socialism. Vincent was convinced that the reign of peace and good will in a socialistic world would begin in half a century. Gauguin broke into one of his derisive and prolonged roars of laughter.

"Peace and good will! Are you blind to what's around you? Can't you see the Machine growing more complex, more dangerous? In half a century we will all be slaves of the Machine and art will be dead. We will have no other God but the Machine and the orators of that day will praise only the Machine and its miracles. Human feelings will not matter. Only the progress of the Machine. Mankind should pray for its one salvation: the loss of all natural feelings. Then it won't suffer so terribly in the years to come."

Vincent pitied Gauguin the Antichrist.

"No Machine can ever destroy man's faith in God."

"What God are you talking about?"

Gauguin had a double purpose in asking him that question. Vincent had printed over his bed,

Je suis Saint Esprit

Je suis sain d'esprit.

What exactly did Vincent mean by claiming that he was the Holy Ghost and that he was sound of mind? Vincent struggled for an answer. How explain God to a man who never felt the wonder of Christ, an artist greater than all artists, disdaining marble, pen or color to work with living flesh. He would explain as Christ explained: by a parable.

"When I was an evangelist among the miners in Belgium, there was a mine explosion. Many were killed. One

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man lay dying. The foreman looked at the dying man and said it was unnecessary to help him, that he was lost, unless one took care of him day and night for forty days. The Company could not afford to save a human life. I asked myself what Christ would have done in my place. I had him carried to my basement. I washed his wounds. I bathed him every day. I spent all my little money on ointments and medicines. I starved that he might live. In a month he was saved. He is alive and well today and he prays for me every Sunday."

Gauguin was silent. Such spirit of sacrifice was beyond him. He believed in Vautrin, the Balzacian hero who forged ahead even if he had to shoot anyone in his way. He felt that modesty was stupidity. Life must be lived with the blow of the fist. But how account for a Vincent Van Gogh and a dying miner? That was not a stupid thing to do. That was magnificent. With real admiration, Gauguin said,

"Tomorrow I am going to paint your portrait."

The portrait was completed within a week. Vincent stared at it suspiciously, peering into it as if to seek a revelation.

"It is certainly I, but it is I gone mad."

Vincent felt himself going mad. It was absurd, but the equanimity of Gauguin reacted upon him as the Chinese torture of regular, monotonous drops of water on a certain spot of the spine. Everything seemed to be so clear and well defined in Gauguin's mind, while his own brain was dull and heavy in a vague, confusing way. At the age of thirty-six, one ought to know what is and what is not, but the poison of doubt that Gauguin instilled in his mind, made life more incomprehensible than ever. He wrote to Theo,

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"Our arguments are terribly electric. We come out of them sometimes with our heads as exhausted as an electric battery after it is discharged."

Gauguin exhausted himself in trying to put some sense into Vincent so that he could make him after his own image. But Vincent would retreat in his shell, and in a queer, stubborn way, would say,

"How can you be so intelligent with such a low forehead?"

Gauguin could not help laughing. Vincent was so incongruous.

"Come, we'll have time enough to philosophize when we're graybeards. For the moment let us enjoy the call of the flesh."

They took their hats and walked to the outskirts of the town where gayety was to be bought in a *maison tolérée*. But Vincent could not change his mood so quickly. Perhaps by dint of questioning he would understand this Godless Gauguin.

"You are a married man and yet you can go to Madame Rosa without a twinge."

"What do you think I am, a eunuch? All women are not sisters and mothers. Would it help Mette the more if I suffered the more? That's the morality of civilization — suffering. It is good to suffer, says the Priest, who has a comfortable income. Everybody admires the Christ of the Crown of Thorns and there is none left to admire the Christ who had a fist fight with the money-changers in the temple. Some day people will call you a saint, because you have suffered so much. Man should fight suffering, not accept it."

The axis of Vincent's world of gravity swung danger-

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ously. How could Gauguin speak that way of suffering after he had suffered so much in Pont Aven? Sorrow is better than laughter. It is man's one mark of nobility. Why, the story of people is like the story of wheat. One must be ground in the millstones in order that others may have bread. Vincent's face was so haggard with suffering as he advanced his arguments, more to himself than to Gauguin, that Gauguin nodded his head in remorse and said,

"You are right, Brigadier!"

They walked on, warring silently against each other. Gauguin approached life through the intellect. Life and art were but clay to be fashioned as the mind dictated. Vincent surrendered himself to his instincts. The mind was so feeble. Faith was the only rock.

But within the house of drawn blinds, moral reflections were distinctly out of place. The girls raised a whoop of delight at the arrival of the two painters, who were the favorites at Madame Rosa's. They pounced upon them, hugging them, kissing them, whirling and dancing about with them. A player piano suddenly burst into a sentimental ditty. Madame Rosa brought out a tray of drinks herself.

"Here is your breakfast, *copains!*"

Between the artists and the prostitutes there was a real bond of sympathy. They were all outcasts, and therefore assumed no pose with each other. The bands of restraint were cast to the four winds.

The girls gravitated more and more around Gauguin. Claudine held him around the waist as if to monopolize him. Claudine was a tall, voluptuous blonde with false curls curving girlishly on her cheeks to give her a younger and cuter look. Her face had a pasty, bleached appearance as if

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it had undergone too many massages. And her raucous voice, full of coarse expression, lent the obscene touch that removed all repression.

"Come on, you big rooster, crow for us."

And Gauguin would break out in an astonishing imitation of Chanticleer.

They recognized in Gauguin an old sailor, who was popular with their sisters in bawdy-houses the world over. Van Gogh was always amazed at the virtuoso skill of his room-mate in attracting women. No sooner did Gauguin step into Madame Rosa's establishment, than his entire temperament took on a decided change. The calm, aloof hardness of an aristocratic *raisonneur* changed to the boisterous brutality of a sailor on a spree. A few drinks and he was acting out his stories before all the house, telling of his escapades in Buenos Ayres and Rio de Janeiro. Even Vincent's girl, Marcia, became less and less eager to fuss over "Carrots" as she called her redheaded man.

Marcia was thin, flat-chested — a brooding type. When Vincent drank too much, he would burst into a sermon meant especially for Marcia.

"The Lord is thy Shepherd! Thou shalt not want! Have faith for He who hath raised the fallen Magdalene will raise the blackest of us all. He who hath never sinned let him cast the first stone...."

Marcia, by this time, would break out sobbing and Vincent would be the target for an avalanche of cushions.

For six months Vincent was the favorite clown at Madame Rosa's. He was the only mad painter in Arles and the butt of a hundred practical jokes. One girl would repent, fall on her knees before him, and would not stand up until

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Vincent fell on his knees and cried with her. Another girl would keep on slapping his face to see whether Vincent would turn the other cheek. He always did. They would sew buttons on him at wrong places or sew his trousers together. It was just the hilarious folly that Vincent needed to keep him from brooding too dangerously on his paintings.

But for the last two months since he had introduced Gauguin at Madame Rosa's, he found himself completely eclipsed. He seemed absurd and feeble in comparison to his brainy, clever friend. Even Marcia fell in love with Gauguin and tried over and over again to win him. But she was known as Vincent's girl, and Gauguin would have nothing to do with her.... The more he repulsed her, the more fanatic became her desire. She grew irritable with Vincent. She felt he was to blame for her failure with Gauguin.

"Don't bother me, you — hyena!"

Vincent swallowed his pride with difficulty. By some bitter fate he was doomed to be the clumsy yokel who adored women and who was despised by them. When Marcia became cold to him, he felt the same bitter torments of spurned love that he had known with three genteel ladies years before. Marcia, cold to him, was Marcia, more adored than ever. He could only babble foolishly.

"Marcia, don't you care for me any more?"

"You! You don't know women. You have the ears of a clever fox, but you're as dumb as a goose."

Something snapped in Vincent's brain. He felt his head crazily reel. He could only think of fox, ears, Gauguin, goose. Gauguin made a goose of him, a goose without ears. He'd make Gauguin a goose. He'd shave off Gauguin's ears. Then Marcia would see who was the goose. Gauguin without ears. He broke out in hysterical laughter.

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Just then Zizi walked down the stairs. Zizi had a plump, placid figure; a pretty, bovine face. Zizi was forever eating and forever demanding gifts. She walked up to Vincent, attracted by his uncontrolled laughter. Vincent was in a good mood. It was two days before Christmas. That was the time to get him.

"What'll you give me for Christmas, Carrots?"

Vincent stopped laughing suddenly. He looked past Zizi into Marcia's eyes.

"I'll bring you a portrait of a goose, do you hear, a goose!"

He ran wildly out of the house, longing for the calm, cold, starlit sky. Gauguin shrugged his shoulders. He called out after him,

"You are right, Brigadier."

Gauguin went to bed late that night. Vincent was apparently sound asleep. No sooner was Gauguin under the sheets than he saw Vincent rise with the rigid slowness, it seemed, of a sleepwalker. Vincent's hand was over his ear as he walked towards Gauguin's bed.

"What's the matter with you, Vincent?"

Vincent scratched his hair, as if trying to recall something. Then returning to his bed, he turned his back to Gauguin. Gauguin could not sleep that night. Undoubtedly something was gravely wrong with his friend.

The following morning, Van Gogh did not utter a word. His hands were trembling a little.

"Can I do anything for you, Vincent?"

Vincent glared at him. His face twitched with pain. Before such suffering, Gauguin felt ashamed of his own sense of misery.

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"A cognac will fix you up, old boy!"

They went to the Café de la Gare. Vincent did not even greet the *patron*.

"*Qu'avez vous, mon vieux,*" the *patron* asked worriedly.

"Just give us two cognacs." Gauguin hushed the *patron* with a gesture of his fingers. He felt he could calm Vincent by appearing unconcerned. This very unconcern enraged Vincent the more. How dared Gauguin be so nonchalant? He had taken away his peace of mind with his perverse ideas, destroyed his faith, stolen his girl. The cognac glasses were placed before them on the table.

"Here's luck!"

Gauguin smiled at him and emptied his glass. A supercilious smile. Vincent's blood boiled. He took his glass of cognac and hurled it. It just missed Gauguin's face. Gauguin sprang to his feet and rushed at Vincent as if to strangle him. He lifted Vincent bodily in his arms and carried him across the Place Lamartine to the yellow house.

Vincent sat at the table sulking. His face was so piteous that Gauguin felt sorry. He cooked and prepared a meal and served Vincent as if he had just come from a hospital. Without a word both retired early.

The next morning Vincent's face was in repose.

"My dear Gauguin, I have a vague remembrance that I offended you yesterday."

"I forgive you gladly and with all my heart, but yesterday's scene might occur again and if I were struck I might lose control of myself and give you a choking, so write your brother I am going back."

Going back? Vincent's voice whined forgiveness.

"I assure you it will never happen again."

But in his heart Gauguin was outraged. He did not realize Vincent was on the verge of madness. He felt, instead, that their difference of opinion made Vincent furious against him. It was with a heavy heart that he wrote Theo that "in consequence of an incompatibility of temperament," he was obliged to leave Arles.

Gauguin mailed the letter at the post office, so that it might get to Paris the quicker. When he reentered the house, Vincent was sitting in utter collapse. He tried to weep but he could not. There was only a twitching of his facial muscles to show his pain.

"Come now, Vincent, don't take it like that. It will be better for you if I go."

Vincent begged fawningly.

"Please don't leave me. At bottom we understand each other, and if we are a bit mad, what of it?"

"All right, we'll give each other another chance."

Gauguin sat down to write another letter, telling Theo to forget his first one. "It was just a bad dream."

However, they sat down to their supper in a strained silence. Vincent was funereal. He began to speculate on the meaning of evil. Gauguin was sick and tired of Vincent's religious mania. His own tough-minded attitude could not sympathize with the tender-minded gropings of his soul-sick friend. The prospect of seeing that same, perplexed face for another six months appalled him. Vincent, sensing Gauguin's weariness, put on a good face.

"But after all no evil exists in this best of worlds in which everything is for the best." Gauguin heard that phrase once too often.

"You are right, Brigadier."

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Gauguin rose from the table, his appetite spoiled, and went out to walk off his irritation. Vincent flushed a fiery red. Gauguin had never before insulted him so directly. My God, what had he said? Simply that everything was for the best in this best of all possible worlds. Gauguin was only making a goose of him. A hot wave of resentment sent him wheeling to his feet. He'd show him who is the goose. He ran upstairs to the bathroom, took a razor, opened it and rushing downstairs, ran out of the house, leaving the door open behind him. He knew just where he would find Gauguin: on the street of the palm trees. There he was with his long, deliberate strides, walking serenely as if all were well with the world. But not for long. One, clean cut of the razor and Gauguin would have the earless face of a goose. Suddenly Gauguin wheeled about and bored his two large, cold, blue eyes into Vincent.

"What's the matter, Vincent?"

Vincent lowered his eyes — a blush of confusion and shame covered his face. He stared idiotically at the razor that was raised before his eyes, then rushed back to the yellow house.

"My God, he's gone mad," and Gauguin in a cold sweat entered the nearest hotel and signed for the night. Art and poverty. Panama and Machines. Arles and Madness. Everywhere disillusionment. What was this evil mockery like a horrible white worm in the core of a glowing, red apple? Perhaps Vincent was right. Man was born to suffer ache after ache that his thoughts might turn Godward. Back in Brittany he would look with even greater sympathy on the hewn statues of the suffering Christ.

Today was the day before Christmas. A few years ago

he would have been at the Magasins du Louvre buying stacks of Christmas toys. Now — he must get to bed early to drown out in sleep the terrible picture of Vincent and the razor. But all through the night Vincent with the razor kept saying to him that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

Vincent ran into his bedroom in overwhelming humiliation. He — an evangelist of Christ — had murder in his heart! How vile he was. He must abase himself. He must humble himself to be forgiven. The pain meant for Gauguin should be inflicted upon himself. He must torture his flesh, make himself even more of a goose to Marcia, so that his spirit might be serene. Vanity and all the worldly desires of the flesh would never torment a man without ears. He would be so ridiculous that the lusts of the flesh and the devil would desert him and he could devote his days entirely to the glory of God in paint.

Razor in hand, he stared at himself in the mirror. His ears struck out like the ears of an ass. He hacked at his right ear with the razor — one, two, three, four, five. The lobe dropped on the drawer. His temples began to thump, the razor dropped from his hand. He washed his face streaming with blood. The water in the wash basin darkened to a fascinating red. He used up four towels before he could stop the bleeding. Covering his mutilated ear with a piece of towel, he pulled his *beret* well over it. He washed the ear, wrapped it in a bit of canvas and covered it with tissue paper. His head began to throb as violently as a steam pump. With painfully slow steps, he walked the twenty blocks to Madame Rosa's.

"Where is Marcia? Marcia! Marcia!"

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Marcia ran down the stairway in a rush, half frightened, half eager. Vincent gave her the little bundle of tissue paper.

"Here it is — my Christmas present!"

"Oh, Carrots, you're a real, good friend!"

Marcia unwrapped the tissue paper. Was it a ring? An emerald? The girls crowded about. Marcia unwrapped the canvas. A sticky mass of pink and white. Claudine picked it up.

"An ear!"

Marcia screamed. Claudine dropped the ear in horror. The other girls shrieked. Madame Rosa ran in. Vincent, his green eyes blazing, jerked off his *beret*. He pointed to his bloody stump, jumped up and down and bellowed,

"Repent! Repent! We are all damned. We are all mad. All of us — fox and geese. — We think ourselves foxes. We think we can escape. We are geese, silly geese in the eyes of God. On your knees! On your knees! Forgive them, O Lord, they know not what they do."

Madame Rosa ran out to call the police. She saw Rollins, the postman down the block, called to him, and they came running in together. Rollins took Vincent by the arm and walked him home. Vincent sobbed and felt sorry for the world. It was not the best of all worlds. Evil was greater than good. God had deserted mankind. When they reached the yellow house, Rollins put Vincent to bed. He did not want the affair to spread. No doubt, Gauguin would be back any moment and all would be well again. He left Vincent in bed mumbling to himself. He had to go back to his duty.

Alone in his room, Vincent stopped his raving. He saw the ceiling moving toward him, the end of the bed stretching infinitely away from him. A church organ pealed a melan-

choly hymn somewhere in the distance. The organ tone became louder and louder until it filled the sky. Angels in white gowns and white wings flew up and down the sky with incredible speed. Many of them brushed their wings over his face. The wings turned to many colors — the pale violet of the wall, the red squares of the floor, the butter-yellow of the bed, the scarlet of the quilt, the green of the windows, the lilac of the door. The colors pressed on him like palpable electric forces. They seemed to tie his muscles into knots. He tried to beat them off. He jerked one hand, then the other. But the colors like immense shadow wings fluttered about him weaving a shroud. In one spasmodic effort, he huddled himself under the sheet, humped up like a gun cock.

Gauguin, after a broken sleep, rose early and walked to the yellow house. He would pack up and leave in the afternoon. Another day with Vincent and he could not be sure of his life. Some gendarmes and excited neighbors were before the door. Fearful that something was wrong, Gauguin ran to them. The chief of police stepped out and faced him.

"What have you done to your friend?"

"I — I don't know —."

"Oh yes — you know well enough — He's dead!"

Gauguin felt his knees give way. He steadied himself by holding his hand on the shoulder of the chief. All was lost. Nothing remained but the guillotine. His tongue became so dry, he could not move it. He wanted to say — impossible — but he could only shake his head dully. He gulped several times. Then realizing he had been wrongly accused, anger loosened his tongue.

"All right, Monsieur, let us go upstairs. We can explain ourselves there."

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On Vincent's bed was a mound covered with white sheets. Nothing was touched. The coroner was still to arrive. Gently, very gently, Gauguin moved his hand toward the body. His fingers touched the body, shakily. It was still warm. The warmth radiated to his own almost paralyzed body, giving him back energy and spirit. At the last moment came the reprieve that saved him from the guillotine. He was his old, masterful self again.

"Be kind enough, Monsieur, to awaken this man with great care, and if he asks for me, tell him I have left for Paris. The sight of me might prove fatal to him."

Gauguin walked out of the house, breathing the air greedily. He would never complain again. To be alive was a priceless gift. He sent a telegram to Theo to come immediately and he waited for Theo at the hotel.

It was Christmas day. Theo, who was about to be married, was already planning his honeymoon. He had just sent Vincent a letter of ecstatic joy. The telegram from Gauguin was a bombshell that sent him flying to Arles on the first train.

Vincent was removed to the hospital under the care of Doctor Rey. The morning after Christmas, he emerged from his fit. The doctor told him the wound in his ear was negligible since no artery was cut. But Vincent's eyes were never again the same. Deep within them was the spectre of madness hunched, ready to spring at any time.

Theo arrived at Arles after a sleepless night on the train.

The two brothers embraced quietly, but Vincent cried a little.

"I will never amount to anything."

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"If you love me, Vincent, you will go on with your painting as if nothing had happened."

Vincent nodded. There was a sweet, resigned expression on his face. He asked for Gauguin. Gauguin had warned Theo that it would be best if he never saw Vincent again. Theo said Gauguin left for Paris. Vincent sighed.

"Tell Gauguin to be confident in himself, that after all no evil exists in this best of worlds in which everything is for the best."

CHAPTER XIII

THE EIFFEL TOWER AND THE YELLOW CHRIST

ONCE MORE the moneyless artist found sanctuary at Schuffenecker's. He painted the portrait of Mrs. Schuffenecker and accounts were balanced. But the account between the man and the world was far from balanced. Spring of 1889! Just past forty! A few more years and there would be no future, only a past of wretched errors, and hopes turned to ashes. The sense of time moving with inexorable swiftness brought a panicky feeling within him. Now was the time he must assert himself. He must be the Paul Gauguin, who belonged to the history of art, or else just Paul Gauguin, an unknown name on an obscure tombstone.

Disaster and failure was the rule, not the exception. Vincent van Gogh was in an insane asylum in the midst of cataleptics and howling maniacs. Was it his turn next? Was he revealing the grimness of failure to Mette? She had written him, "Your last letters have been so little affectionate that I do not know what to believe any more. You do nothing to give me a little courage and that should not be so difficult it seems to me. Write me soon, I suffer a great deal for you."

Just because he had written her in a justified mood of irritation, the lines: "What the devil! There are other letters to write than those on money."

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Why should she be complaining?

"Your life is free from every hindrance. Surrounded by your family and the children, the days for you pass, not without painful work, but free from marital authority, esteemed, honored, loved. Your personality finds its expression."

As for him, he had written her — (it was a moment of weakness, but one cannot always be strong),

"Our two lives are broken. There is no use weeping. The past can never be erased. It can be forgotten sometimes."

Only man by some sad mockery learns to laugh who learns that he must die. Doomed to know his aching heart alone, he dons the air of courage. For society is indifferent to those who would look too deeply into life. Society! What a cruel word for the artist. Society meant the prestige that a social accident or a financial combination offered. It meant materialism. It meant the Eiffel Tower.

On April 2, 1889, the flag was hoisted on the tallest structure in the world. Fireworks filled the air and twenty-one cannon shots were fired. The great crowd shouted, "Glory to Monsieur Eiffel! *Vive la France! Vive Paris! Vive la République.*" Beneath this tower of steel all the races of men and all their works had been brought together for the Universal Exposition. The golden calf, on four towering legs of steel, was the symbol of the God of the twentieth century — the Machine.

In the Palace of the Machines under a glass dome, great crowds gaped pop-eyed at monstrous engines in their full whirl of movement. Edison and Eiffel were the heroes of the day. Edison's electric light and phonograph were the marvels that dazzled spectators as no work of art could dazzle them. Eiffel's tower was stamped on handkerchiefs,

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eaten in chocolate, dangled from watchchains, and formed into candlesticks. Street after street boasted of the progress of man from the cave dweller to the manipulator of the telephone. As for art, the "*Paris Illustré*" devoted a colored double page to the masterpiece of the day: "Springtime" by Eugene Van Marcke, revealing three languorous cows taking their ease under an old apple tree.

How escape this world of the mechanical that was destroying all the fine sensibilities in man to make of him the hideous caricature of the "useful man"? The useful man. He was already to be seen everywhere, always on the move, the snap of efficiency in his voice, the hardness of ambition in his eyes.

You important gentlemen in silk hats proudly inspecting the new Mackay cable, hear my thoughts —

"How can you understand my passion to paint, you, who regard work as a means to buy a house, a woman, a family and a respectable funeral?"

It was important to let the world know that above the immense iron chimney of the Eiffel Tower there existed the colorful dreams of an artist. There was the Palace of the Beaux Arts, of course, next to the Palace of the Machines. But the musty graybeards in charge of the Beaux Arts would allow no paintings that had color and life. Only the dead artists were venerated. They were nothing to be afraid of. Then how bring the dreams of the living to the open?

To the open! Exactly! And Gauguin hit upon the idea of exhibiting at the Café Volpini, where thousands passed on the way to the Exposition. The cry was sent out for all the revolutionaries to assemble — Emile Bernard, Van Gogh, Louis Anquetin, Daniel de Monfried, Serusier, Filiger, even Schuffenecker! A catalogue was printed, striped blue and

white, announcing the Catalogue of the Exposition of Pictures of the Synthecist Group on the premises of M. Volpini at the Champs-de-Mars, 1889. And sure enough the thousands rushing to reach the top of the Eiffel Tower paused in bewilderment before the Volpini Café blazing with hundreds of paintings in exotic colors and in simple, almost child-like designs.

In the same café, a Princess Dolgorousky directed an orchestra of women violinists, seducing the crowds to the paintings and the liqueurs by the seductive rhythm of the Blue Danube.

The day after the opening, the men at the head of the Beaux Arts went into the Café Volpini obviously to drink their beers, but they managed to see the paintings at the same time through the corner of their eyes. Gauguin was seated with Daniel de Monfried when he noticed that great giant of an artist, Meissonier, the grand rajah of the Beaux Arts. Gauguin raised his voice so that Meissonier might hear him.

"Once upon a time the wild animals, the big ones, used to roar. Today they are stuffed."

Meissonier, in his turn, raised his voice so that the impudent Gauguin might hear him. Lifting his glass of beer he said to his colleagues,

"Gentlemen, it is high time for painters to become free and liberal. Let us throw off this mean little box of ours with its juries, its medals, its prizes, just like a school for children. From now on, no more medals, now that we have them all."

Hilarious laughter followed and then their glasses were emptied with satisfaction. Gauguin commented bitterly,

"They can afford to spoof. They have the crowd with them. The crowd always bows down before the man who

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has charge of the relics, but there is a fable that sometimes the relics are too heavy and the man in charge drowns."

As the potentates of the Beaux Arts were about to leave, one of them took off his heavy black hat to wipe his brow. Gauguin cried out to him,

"One must be prudent. Do not give up wearing your hat or genius will fly away."

But the prosperous artists stroked their beards, curled their mustaches and left in dignified silence.

One critic made a great commotion about the exposition. Albert Aurier, who was to be seen in cafés brandishing his huge arms like clubs to beat some ideas into the stubborn heads of the bourgeoisie, was all on fire for Gauguin.

He saw in the exposition of the Symbolists the revolutionary cry for the right to dream, the right to stretch the imagination toward the azure, toward the stars. No more myopic copies of social anecdotes. No more flat observations as banal as daguerreotypes. He ended his article by demanding the walls of the Pantheon and more walls besides for Gauguin to paint upon. But Albert Aurier was a solitary voice. The newspaper critics accused the Symbolists of trying to steal into the Universal Exposition by the back door.

Of what avail was this café exposition when the crowds and the newspapers spoke only of peace, progress and prosperity, when the lack of money made life for Gauguin the same nightmare of uncertainty as ever? He had a strong body and the will to travel across continents and seas to Tonkin and Madagascar. Instead he was forced to live from meal to meal at Schuffenecker's like a goldfish within a bowl, always dreaming of measureless jungled sea-weeds beneath the sea, always butting against glass walls.

The farthest into the Orient he could reach was the

Colonial section of the Universal Exhibition. There, on one street, Morocco called to him with its mottled bazaar behind arched windows. On another street was the temple of India painted blood-red, traced with mystical figures in gray stucco. He would turn a corner to stare at an Aztec temple rising with pyramid steps toward the sun. Across the street was the Cambodian Palace, built after the famous ruins of the Angkor-Vat, inlaid with tiers of sinuous dancing girls.

Sometimes he would stand before a Mosque where a Turkish band whose exotic shrillness of clarionets and cymbals would whip his blood to strange pulses of desire. Or else a Javanese band of xylophone-like kanelings, large gongs, and tom toms would evoke a longing that was a stabbing homesickness for his childhood days in Peru. And then the saffron-painted Javanese dancing girls, their necks and arms covered with jewels! How he would sway with them, with their slow, dreamy movements, their bodies bending in serpentine curves, their hands and arms twisting in a melancholy rhythm. Then there was Aiouscha of the Egyptian café, shocking the Parisians with her *danse de ventre!* Only primitive people could so shamelessly revel in voluptuous movements. As if to excite his thoughts still further, the tent housing the women of a noble Congo chief had the forbidding but tantalizing sign, "No admittance for men."

He would emerge from this panorama of the Orient to the workaday world of Paris with a greater desire to escape than ever. But escape was a futile dream for a man without money, unless it was an escape to the mysterious world of dreams. It was to books finally that he turned for consolation.

Schopenhauer was the reigning influence.

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"The world is a representation. I do not see what is. What is is what I see."

Just what Gauguin was doing in painting. Now he could quote Schopenhauer to back up his theories against copying Nature.

He read Barbey d'Aurevilly and his doctrine of the dandy.

"The world belongs to the cool of mind."

Gauguin smiled at the thought of himself as a dandy, feigning aloofness, scented with amber, a carnation in his buttonhole, speaking of women as charming little animals, of painting as an opium of inferior quality, of literature as only a substitute for society. Affectation of affectations. All is affectation.

He read Villier de l'Isle — Adam.

"Why go to lands where the caravans pass in the shade of palm trees of Cashmir? In reality, they are ugly. We have destroyed, in our strange dreams, the love of life. It is best to commit suicide."

Sour grapes! Pierre Loti, singing of more primitive lands in nostalgic, honey-laden phrases, was the surer guide. But his love-affairs were too tangled with the gold lace of his uniform. There was a world even more primitive, even more to be desired. Some day, when there would be money — In the meantime, he read Huysmans. Huysmans, the post office clerk, who spoke of him — ten years before — as the most promising painter in France, who gave him the courage to plunge into the world of art. Perhaps, Huysmans in his "*A Rebours*" had some consoling message, now that his art, determined to be original, doomed him to eternal poverty.

The devil! The hero of his book was a wealthy man.

Leave it to a post office clerk to imagine himself a wealthy man. How was one to bury himself in a mansion, to play with the sensations of precious stones, fantastic paintings, weird flowers, liqueurs, perfumes and voluptuous women unless one had the fortune of the merchant who had just built a sixteen-million-franc mansion on the Champs Elysées? But the last sentence of the book haunted him.

"O Lord, pity the Christian who doubts, the skeptic who would believe, the convict of life embarking alone in the night under a sky no longer illumined by the consoling beacons of ancient faith."

Precisely. The Western world no longer believed in Christ. It believed in the Eiffel Tower. He would paint symbolic pictures to show the world how completely neglected was the Christ to whom it only paid the lip service of banal hymns.

At last he saw a possible escape. With the money from the few paintings he sold at the Volpini exhibition he would retire for the summer to Pont Aven again and create something new in the genre of religious paintings. After all, Millet's "Angelus" sold that year for six hundred thousand francs. Religious paintings were always in demand. Symbolism and religion might be twin stars that would lead him to prosperity and the peace of a father surrounded by his family.

It was at the Gloanec Pension at Pont Aven that Vincent, during a period of lucidity, wrote to him,

"Make of painting what Wagner has done with music, an art that would console broken hearts."

Vincent used to say that God loved yellow, because the sun was yellow. But the yellow in Gauguin's "Yellow Christ" was the color of sickness and regret. The stupid

peasants worshipped at his feet placidly, with no understanding of the lean and horribly sad face that looked down on them from the cross, not with love but with despair. He seems to ask Himself if His martyrdom had been in vain, if Humanity could ever learn the meaning of fellowship and love, if the Hereafter is nothing but a dream of vanity. One could almost hear the words from His mouth,

"My God, my God, why hast Thou deserted me?"

Mette must not think he had deserted her.

"I am working very hard but no luck. People respect me as the most important painter in Pont Aven. But it is true, nevertheless, this does not help me to get rich. Not even a sou; but perhaps it is all a preparation for the future. In any case it creates for me a respected position — American, English, Swedish and French artists are all discussing my advice, which I am idiotic enough to give them.

"Because in reality they are using me without returning the least sign of thankfulness. By doing all this I certainly do not put on any weight. I weigh less than you — 138 pounds. I am slender as a thread but in return I seem to become younger. The more difficulties I have the more power I create, but without getting the least encouragement. I am living only on credit. But we must struggle and take the consequences of what we do. And possibly one beautiful day, an enthusiastic soul will pick me up from the gutter — when my art will have opened everybody's eyes."

But the Gauguin of the symbolic religious paintings was more misunderstood than heretofore. When Vincent heard of it, he wrote his brother that it gave him a painful feeling of collapse instead of progress. When Gauguin offered "The Good Angel" to his landlady, she refused it with a "*Quel horreur!*" When he offered "The Struggle of

Jacob and the Angel" to the *curé* of Pont Aven, the good *curé* thought it a sacrilege. When he displayed his religious paintings in the dining room of the Gloanec Pension, an academic painter scratched on one of them the words—"Anteroom to Charenton." (Charenton was the largest insane asylum in France.)

The Gauguin of the "Yellow Christ" had learned his lesson. His religious paintings showed that the legends of the Christian religion were only formalities that did not speak to the hearts of the people any more.

The accusing evangelist never was popular. Only sweet, sentimental Millets were understood. Gauguin took up lessons in boxing and fencing as if to prepare himself for a more vigorous onslaught against a hostile world.

CHAPTER XIV

ESCAPE! ESCAPE!

THE STAR of the Volpini exhibition did not realize the impression he left behind him in Paris. Serusier, a promising academic painter, after seeing the negresses and palm trees in Gauguin's works, said to him, "I am yours." He spread the doctrine of his self-imposed master to the students in the Julian Academy, and from there it spread all over artistic Paris. Serusier would repeat Gauguin's words,

"How does that tree look to you? Green? All right then, use green, the greenest green, on your palette. And that shadow a little bluish? Don't be afraid. Paint it as blue as you can."

Catch phrases were repeated from mouth to mouth. "Away from Nature, towards abstraction." "Draw the veil of imagination before your eyes and see only what you wish to see!" "Do not mistake accuracy for truth!" "To be a child again, that should be the goal of an artist!" Gauguin, the leader, was at last making himself felt.

One day a hunchbacked dwarf with the face of a shrewd and penetrating Jew arrived at Pont Aven and asked for Paul Gauguin.

"My name is Meyer de Haan. I come from Amsterdam. I have a historical painting under negotiation with the Museum of Amsterdam for a hundred thousand francs. It is

the last historical painting I will ever do. I want to learn the new art. Pissarro advised me to come to you."

At last "an enthusiastic soul" had come to take him out of his gutter. Meyer de Haan offered to share all expenses with him. Now he could make good his escape. What he had sought in religion had failed him. Perhaps in a wilderness of Nature he would find the quietism of a Buddha that so fascinated him in the Temple of India at the Universal Exhibition.

One of the first lessons Gauguin gave de Haan reflected his state of mind.

"Let everything you do breathe peace and calm of soul. Avoid all animated attitudes. Each of your figures should be perfectly static."

The sailor within him drove him inevitably nearer the ocean. On a beach where the waves roared with a heart-rending melancholy against the rocks and where the eyes could look into the distance and see nothing but flat-land and the thorny outlines of oak trees, they found an isolated inn run by an amiable hostess, Mlle. Marie Henry. Nearby was a bare shed that was used for coaches. The two artists looked upon the shed greedily and their minds nurtured the idea of a perfect studio.

They fell to work with vigor. They cleaned the shed, built a wooden floor and glassed the northern wall. All over they hung copies of "Olympia" by Manet, the "Triumph of Venus" by Botticelli, the decorative washes of Puvis de Chavannes. Little by little the shed became a treasure house of art. The windows were painted with scenes of peasant life. Portraits of the artists looked down from the four walls. On a chimney shelf was the immense bust of Meyer de Haan that Gauguin carved from a block of wood. Little

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pots were arranged on shelvings between statuettes of negresses and Javanese dancers. A panel of a woman and geese had upon it the admonition "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense." They decorated wooden plates on which Gauguin carved his personal legend, "I love onions fried in oil." The motto of Wagner was painted on a wooden panel over a mirror, "All art executed for money is without value." There was a frieze of Japanese prints all around the room. Masanobous, satiric studies of important people puffed with pride, Tanghes, warlike historical scenes; Shounshos, intimate glimpses of stage life; Outamaros, courtesans like languishing cats; Hiroshiges, landscapes and volcanoes; Hokusais, scenes on waterfronts. And as a final pagan touch to the artistic monastery was the proverb inscribed on the door,

"Vive le vin, l'amour et le tabac!"

Gauguin's very appearance took on the pagan transformation in his mind. He began to wear his black hair long. A thin beard cut like a horseshoe bordered his chin. And a short square mustache gave him an hierarchic appearance mindful of some antique Egyptian or Cretan who found himself accidentally in the nineteenth century.

The days went by with the regularity and the serene devotion of a church mass. Up at seven to exploit the countryside for shapes and colors and forms. Back at noon for lunch and out again till five, drawing or painting with the frenzy of de Haan's favorite author, Carlyle, whose words lashed them on,

"Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it, in God's name."

From five to seven an interlude of rest, of playing on the mandolin, of wood carving or a game of lotto. Then

both would fall ravenously upon the heavy meal that Mademoiselle Henry prepared for her dozen hungry artists, who, she claimed, ate more than fishermen or farm hands. With the peace of a well-fed stomach they would settle around the oil lamp of their studio and fill their pipes from a jar of tobacco. De Haan religiously kept it full, for he had learned to know that a Gauguin without his tobacco was not a tender wolf.

The fact that they were living in the year 1890, gave rise to many philosophic discussions about the approaching twentieth century. De Haan was the best-read of them all and he would sit quietly as Filiger and Gauguin would argue out their different points.

Filiger was a tender Mediævalist, buried in the age of the Virgin and the Child and his utterance presented a strange counterpoint to the cynical aphorisms of Gauguin.

"For the artist the Middle Ages was the happiest time of all. The Church had money and there were thousands of panes of glass to be stained at leisure. What utter peace in their hearts. They knew what was good and what was evil. The City of Satan belonged to the unbelievers, the gluttonous, and the rich.

"The city of God belonged to the faithful, the charitable, the poor. Death was only a matter of waiting.

"It was easy to adore then, while today—"

Gauguin would take up the thought.

"Yes, today is the day of big business, of the machine." He stared at his fresco of a blue Joan of Arc on the wall, a dreaming peasant girl with her goose.

Filiger would sigh,

"Ah — if we could only live as monks and church bells could ring our lives in and ring them out."

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But Gauguin would answer brutally,

"To the devil with your church bells. Your monks lived as unnatural a life as bank clerks do today. There is only one place on earth that is completely happy. The mariners used to call it the first world, it resembled the Garden of Eden so much. . . . In the South Sea Isles food falls from the trees. Water flows at the feet. No clothes to worry about, no sins to whine about. No lawyers, no poor relations, no millionaires, no glory to die for. Love does not mean the marriage and responsibility it means to us. Love is free. Jealousy does not exist. How absurdly simple their life and how damnably complex our own life is. A man marries a woman and he is burdened to support her the rest of his life. Every new child means greater poverty. Ninety-nine people slave away to make one rich man happy. And the poor devils dare not do anything unless it is moral, unless it is allowed by this law or that custom. An artificial man has been built in us always fighting the natural man and we live and die in misery and pain. It is all so stupid."

It was time for de Haan to quote from the "Sartor Resartus" he always kept within his reach. As if to assuage Gauguin's restlessness, he read an underlined passage:

"To many fondly imagined Fountains did I pilgrim; to great men, great cities, great events, but I found there no healing. In strange countries as in the well-known; in savage deserts as in the press of corrupt civilization, it was ever the same; how could your wanderer escape from — his own shadow."

But Gauguin would fight de Haan at his own game. He brought with him from Paris a pamphlet on Tahiti issued by the Chamber of Commerce at the Universal Exhibition.

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"Listen to this and then dare to talk to me of shadows. 'Happy dwellers of a country where Nature is fruitful, the Tahitian has never known the law of work. An even temperature, a soil of prodigious fecundity have made him naturally indolent and carefree. So favored by nature, his morals are, necessarily, easy-going and peaceful. He is dreamy and voluptuous and conjugal fidelity is for him a virtue as unknown as it is little appreciated. He loves the play, the dance and music and everything is a matter of distraction to him.' "

The South Sea Islands became a fixed obsession with him. The surf, a hundred yards away, tugged at his sailor's heart. There were warm afternoons when he could not work. He would sit, a solitary figure, on the lonely sand beach, staring into space, the witching visions of Tahitian girls calling to him. Once he wept with the intense longing within him to be off on seas forlorn, to slough off his old skin of a civilized man, of a father, of a worried pauper, to begin a new life again, a sort of second youth among the South Sea Islanders back to the origin of the world!

A mystical fever took possession of him, as of some ancestor speaking through him and calling him into the primitive dawn of mankind. Once, when Filiger sat with him and they talked of death and immortality, Gauguin said to him:

"If I gaze before me into space, I have a vague sense of the Infinite. I understand there has been a beginning and there will be an end. This mysterious sense of mystery, this sensation is intimately linked to the eternal life promised by Jesus. God does not belong to the scholar, the logician. He belongs to the poets, to their dreams. He is the symbol of Beauty, Beauty itself."

It was in such trance-like moods that he spoke more

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and more eloquently of the primitive world. Finally, de Haan himself was carried away and gave his promise to go to Tahiti. Gauguin had previously won over another artist, Emile Bernard, to his project. The Gauguin in the summer of 1890 in Pouldu had an exotic charm about him. He attracted many artists from Paris to visit him until Pouldu took on the proportions of a school. All began dreaming with their master of a tropical school of art in Polynesia which would center the art of the future.

When Vincent heard of it he wrote his brother, not without a twinge of envy:

"He is a father. He has a wife and children in Denmark and at the same time he wants to go to the other end of the earth. He has a sort of need of expansion and he finds, and there is some truth in it, the artistic life mean. With his experience of travel, what can I say to him?"

Gauguin was so confident of his voyage he announced his plans to all the world. To one friend he wrote:

"My resolution is made. I intend to go in a short time to Tahiti, a little island of Oceania where one can exist without money. A terrible epoch is opening up for the coming generation — the reign of gold."

"All will perish — men and art. It is necessary to break away. There, at least, under a sky that never knows winter, on an earth of a marvellous fecundity, the Tahitian has only to raise his arms to find nourishment. He never works, for the Tahitian to live is to sing and to love. Freed from material cares, I can devote myself to the great work of art, free of all artistic jealousy, with no need to commercialize it."

Even Mette was to share his dreams. He wrote to her:

"Would that the day come and soon when I could bury

myself in the woods of some Pacific Island and live there in ecstasy, in peace with my art. Surrounded by my family, far from the European struggle for money, there at Tahiti, I could, in the silence of these beautiful tropical nights, listen to the murmuring music of my heart, keeping sweet time with the mysterious breath of my beloved ones. Free, finally, without worry about money, I could live, sing and die."

Suddenly, like a thunderous shower on a serene July day, he heard towards the end of that month, the news of the suicide of Vincent van Gogh. Vincent had written him, begging to come to Pouldu, but there was always the danger of an epileptic attack, and Gauguin turned thumbs down. Vincent had been under the care of a private doctor. He had painted his portrait, the famous heartbroken face of Doctor Guichet, but he was under the constant dread that during one of his fits he might kill someone. One day he felt all his energy pouring out of him and a great blackness pouring into his brain. Sitting under an oak tree he murmured, "It is impossible, impossible," and he fired a bullet into his stomach. He lived for two days, smoking his pipe, his brother Theo weeping beside him.

"Ah, well, my work, I risked my life for it. Do not cry, Theo. It will be best for both of us. I won't be a frightful expense to you any more."

In the same mood of reconciliation to the best of all possible worlds he wrote to Gauguin:

"Dear Master, after having known you and caused you pain, it is better to die in a good state of mind than in a degraded one."

A little later Gauguin heard that Theo died broken-hearted, leaving a wife and child behind him. Then Laval,

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having set his heart upon painting and seeing himself but a pale imitation of Gauguin, committed suicide. Emile Bernard wrote him that his parents were objecting too strenuously against his going to the South Seas. And last of all, Meyer de Haan, feeling his feeble strength ebbing away, took to reading Ecclesiastes. In October he embraced Gauguin in farewell, and departed for Amsterdam to die in his father's home.

On a little pot, Gauguin painted the words, "Hurrah for Synthesis." All his theories of Synthecism now seemed so much child's play before the brooding eyes of tragedy.

"This filthy Europe where men of sensitivity and noble feelings are driven to drink, to suicide, to escape melancholia."

Escape, escape to Tahiti, even though alone!

CHAPTER XV

LIFT ANCHOR FOR EXOTIC LANDS

ONE NOVEMBER morning towards the end of 1890, Schuffenecker opened his door to a man who was dressed in a Buffalo Bill hat, a voluminous cape and carved wooden shoes painted gold, azure, and vermillion. Schuffenecker was so startled he blinked his eyes.

"Mon Dieu, I thought you were Monsieur Buffalo Bill himself."

"Don't let a little originality frighten you."

And Gauguin with his usual brazen manner of feeling himself at home there, flung off his cape, revealing a woolen jersey, embroidered around the collar, a coat, touched up with some decorative figures, and pantaloons that were slightly too large because he bought them ready-made at the bargain price of twelve francs fifty. His very clothes bespoke the defiance in his soul.

But this time Gauguin found Schuffenecker a little colder than usual. Schuffenecker did not try to conceal the fact that he was a little tired of feeding a man who repaid his hospitality with an insolent indifference. He could not understand that Gauguin had to assume this attitude to hide the shame of accepting charity. What was worse, Gauguin glanced obliquely at Schuffenecker's paintings and turned his back on them without comment. Perhaps Gau-

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guin was irritated with his friend's prosperity. For Schuffenecker was already becoming known as the man who had such a beautiful collection of art.

The day came when Schuffenecker screwed up enough courage to call Gauguin "downright impudent."

"My only 'impudence' consists in my telling the truth about things," Gauguin replied, and moved his belongings to a hotel room.

It was sheer folly for Gauguin. He had only about fifty francs to his name. But he didn't give a damn. He was in no mood to be polite when all his friends were disappearing off the earth. Even Seurat died at the promising age of twenty-eight. Gauguin buried himself alive in a cheap café as if to contemplate his misery the better.

He sat all day and most of the night at the Café Gangloff, cheating hunger by pouring cognac in his coffee. A steam organ bellowed the sentimental ditties of "Carmen" and "Wilhelm Tell." There was a continual click of billiard balls from the back room. *Midinettes* and workers threw dice from a cup at the counter to determine who would pay for the rum. Old men played dominoes on marble tables. Gauguin sat alone in his corner, the brim of his hat pulled over his eyes — brooding, brooding. The illusion of making money from his art he now knew to be nothing more than an illusion. Forty-three years old, his heart exhausted, drained, with everlasting disappointments!

He was born in a month of barricades, the ratatap of musketry, the hoarse shoutings of the revolutionists of 1848. In the dim days of his childhood, when he was but four in Peru, he woke one night to find the eyes of his grandfather's picture moving. It was an earthquake. His mother seized him and ran out in the street, where hun-

dreds had assembled in their nightclothes. Amidst frenzied cries half the town tumbled in ruins. A block away in the harbor, ships were tossing about like corks. When he was seven years old, a schoolboy in Orléans, he saw a picture of a man, a stick over his shoulder, a bundle at the end of the stick, walking on the highway. He wrapped up some sand in a cloth, tied it to the end of a stick, and wandered off into the forest of Bondy. A butcher returning from a neighboring town recognized him and brought him back. Revolutions, earthquakes, and wanderlust — symbols of his life.

"Cheer up, *mon brave*, the day will come when you will laugh at it all."

A thin, dark-haired girl with large, intimate eyes sat down at his table and ordered two cognacs. Gauguin smiled wanly. Her name was Juliette. She was not merely a model but a consoling friend. Now he need not eat alone at the *cremerie* amidst plasterers in blue blouses. Juliette served the same purpose as the servant who was his mistress in Pouldu, and who was to be reached after midnight by climbing through his window onto the roof of the kitchen.

During this time he met an artist who exhibited with him at the Volpini Café, and who was to be the truest friend of his life. An old sea-dog like Gauguin, Daniel de Monfried once captained a boat over the Mediterranean. Strangely enough he was also in a predicament similar to Gauguin's. He was struggling to protect his art from the domestic worries of a nagging wife and ever-hungry children. However, de Monfried had a studio, and Gauguin, eager once more to find forgetfulness in painting, was only too glad to share it with him.

A little later he was offered a position as instructor

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in a Montparnasse studio. But when he told his students: "Paint the way you like, as long as it is intelligent," it was decided that as a teacher he was an excellent artist.

He began to meet his old friends more frequently. Charles Morice with his large hat, his lavalliere cravat, and his heavy cane, the poet-publicist who made it his business to know everyone and to be everywhere, greeted him effusively.

"Where have you been, Monsieur Gauguin? We are all talking about you. The Chief of the Symbolist painters should be on the battlefield, not in retirement."

And Morice exhibited him at the Café Voltaire, the Saturday night refuge for the Symbolists. There he became a friend of Verlaine, the Falstaff of the Boulevard St. Michel, his face a network of sensitive lines, his little eyes gleaming with thirst for women, alcohol and the Absolute. Gray-bearded, unkempt, a child in his lack of dignity, his petulant moods, weeping one moment, laughing the next, blazing with anger and then begging for a drink. But he was the new God of the younger poets, displacing the rhetorical emptiness of a Victor Hugo with his sensuous poetry. When Verlaine intoned the lines of his poem:

*"What hast thou done, O thou,
Ceaselessly weeping—
Pray tell me, what hast thou done
Of thy youth?"*

Gauguin felt the poison of remorse creeping over him. A devil of a poet, this Verlaine! While drinking with Verlaine, Gauguin overheard the story of Rimbaud. Straining his ears he could catch the significant phrases from the adjacent table:

"A large red-fisted country-boy—about seventeen—face of a child corrupted early in life—one ideal—force and independence. The rest was literature. No use for beauty and morals—Dominated Verlaine though Verlaine was ten years older. He prided himself on the disorder of his mind—practised hallucinations—He would see a mosque instead of a factory, a drawing room at the bottom of a lake. Verlaine was married, domesticated. Rimbaud said it was a squalid form of suicide. He made Verlaine desert his wife. They lived together. They stole—vagabonded through Europe. Once Verlaine shot him, wounded him—went to prison for it. Another time Rimbaud beat him up and left him for dead near a river. At nineteen this Rimbaud had tasted all emotions, written immortal poetry. Twenty years ago he wrote his last lyric."

"What happened to him?"

"He felt literature was a weakness. He escaped into a life of pure action. Now he is a trader in Abyssinia."

"What a pity!"

"Not at all! He wanted to have gold, to be indolent, to have a harem. He has them now. He said what he wanted to say. He has pointed the way for the next step in literature, to look deep into the disorders of our minds."

Verlaine blinked his eyes at Gauguin and said:

"Hé! Zut! They tire me! These cymbalists!"

But there were tears in Verlaine's eyes, for he loved Rimbaud as he had never loved anyone since.

Gauguin wondered at the fate of a young poet turned business man, in comparison to himself, who was a business man turned artist. At least Rimbaud had escaped the banalities and weary café chatter of the European world, while he found himself too much of a hero to be permitted to

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remain silent, while he still wasted empty hours in empty theories. A few drinks, an audience, and he found himself declaiming as vehemently as he ever did.

"There is no way out of the decadence we have fallen into except by a frank return to the primitive. Look at Meissonier's horses, slick, polished, a mere trick. Compare them to the horses of the Ancient Greeks or the Assyrians. They are not copies, but they are the very soul of horses. Egyptian drawings, Byzantine mosaics, Italian primitives. There we have the art of the mind, simple, abstract. Simplify, simplify—a few straight lines, the arcs of a circle, a few angles, the arcs of an ellipse and there you have it. Inner vision is more important than outward nature. Artists no longer rely on the imagination. They are mere slaves, mere copyists of Nature."

His theories would start prolonged explanations of Symbolism among the poets until their minds became as hazy as the tobacco smoke in the café. Symbolism of colors—saffron, the color of love and wisdom; purple, of royalty; white, of purity. Symbolism of vowels in poetry—A—black; e—white; i—red; o—blue; u—green! Symbolism of animals—a fox for deceit, a raven for mockery!

While Gauguin was reeling under such turgid imaginings, he painted the greatest blunder of his life: "The Loss of Maidenhood." A reclining nude girl, a red fox with one paw on her left breast, in the background a wedding ceremony. The significance of that painting kept the Symbolists busy for many a Saturday night.

One night Gauguin felt he had had enough. Art for art's sake? Why not. Art for life's sake? Why not. Art for pleasure's sake? Why not. What does it matter so long as it is art. He felt it was time for him to strike. He had made

many new friends. They might well be prospective buyers of his paintings. He turned to Morice:

"If I could get a critic to write a resounding article on my works, I could auction them off and I might have enough to go to Tahiti."

Morice thought awhile, then tapping the table he said:

"Mallarmé can help us."

Just then Moreas came in, the Greek with the black-purple beard, and the youngsters burst into a song for his benefit to an air in "Carmen":

*"Jean Moreas a publié
Le Pelerin Passionné
Buvons amis, oui, oui, buvons avec excès
A sa gloire, a son succès
Et célébrons, et célébrons
Son immortalité.*

What a contrast to this noisy café clique was the cloisteral quiet of a Tuesday evening at Mallarmé's. When Gauguin and Morice entered the home of Mallarmé, a great silence met them, stifling the noises outside. It was a homely interior they saw: heavy carved furniture, a tall clock, a few paintings of Manet and Whistler. The devotees of Mallarmé were already seated about the large, round table, bare except for the oil lamp and the china bowl odorous with tobacco. Mallarmé was seated in his favorite rocking chair under the mantelpiece smoking his perennial cigar, his eyes following the meandering smoke as if for inspiration. He was a meticulously dressed little man with dreamy eyes and fawn-like ears. His smile was genuinely affable. Despite their difference in physique, Gauguin and Mallarmé took to each other immediately. There was an air of earnestness about

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them both. Morice introduced Gauguin as the man who was about to sail for Tahiti to escape civilization. The impression created was profound. The air was thick with smoke and silence. Then came a voice:

"It is not ridiculous, because there are two things that cannot be ridiculous — a child and a savage."

Another silence of a few minutes, as each man carefully prepared his words. For it was one of the unwritten laws of Mallarmé's Symbolist Chapel that direct statements were forbidden. Only suggestions were allowed. Another voice at last found expression:

"Thou art but what thou thinkest."

Then in the palpitating silence, Mallarmé recited one of his poems, two lines of which stirred Gauguin profoundly:

*"I will depart, O steamer, swaying rope and spar.
Lift anchor for exotic lands that lie afar."*

Mlle. Mallarmé brought in a huge bowl of punch and the symbolistic tension was relieved. As they drank from their glasses under the rose reflection of the lamp, they began to question Gauguin more and more directly. As if to justify his choice of a primitive country Gauguin told a story:

"I once happened to be in the roads at Rio de Janeiro. The heat was extreme; everyone was asleep on deck, some forward, some aft. The sleeping cabin boy was dreaming too violently and too violently he fell into the water. Man overboard! Everybody woke up and stared stupidly at the boy, who was being swept along by the current towards the stern of the ship. A negro sailor cried out, 'Thundering Jesus, he's going to drown.' Then, without a thought, he

flung himself into the sea and brought the little cabin boy to the ladder at the stern."

It wasn't necessary to add a moral. All took for granted the evils of the white man's civilization. Mallarmé said:

"At bottom, I consider the contemporary epoch an interregnum for the poet, who had best keep clear of it, for it is too decrepit, and too much in preparatory effervescence for him to do anything except work in mystery, in view of the future, and from time to time send his visiting card, stanzas or sonnets, to the living, to avoid being stoned by them, should they by chance suspect they do not exist."

Gauguin was a success with Mallarmé. Mallarmé praised him to Octave Mirabeau, and that celebrated novelist wrote in the "Echo de Paris" the resounding article that Gauguin desired—an article in the mood of—

"The case of a man fleeing civilization, of his own will searching forgetfulness and silence the better to feel, the better to listen to the voice within, drowned out in the noise of our passions and our disputes, appears to me curious and touching. Never satisfied with what he has realized, he searches always the beyond."

The panegyric sent a crowd of sympathizers to pack the auction room of the Hotel Drouot. Gauguin, with a halo of martyrdom around his head, found his pictures selling at an average of four hundred francs apiece.

"Ca vaut mieux qu'ca, messieurs," said the auctioneer, and the painting of "Jacob Struggling With The Angel" reached the new top of nine hundred francs. Schuffenecker and Degas helped to swell the grand total to nine thousand eight hundred and sixty francs.

With Morice he went to the office of Ary Renan, the Minister of Public Instruction, and he came out with a

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signed paper entrusting him with an art mission from the Republic of France to the Colony of Tahiti. But there was little comfort when Monsieur Renan said to him:

"No salary goes with this mission, but as our custom is, and as we have done in the case of the painter Dumoulin's mission in Japan, we shall indemnify you on your return by making some purchases. You may count upon us, Monsieur Gauguin: when you come back, write to us, and we shall send you the expenses of the trip."

March 23, a farewell dinner was given him at the Café Voltaire. Speeches—toasts to the modern noble savage. Rousseau could only theorize. Gauguin would actually live the life of the noble savage. The gauntlet had been cast down upon the arena of the machine age. Paul Gauguin would point the road to liberty for days to come. Down with the false conventions of Paris. Hooray for the anarchists in Tahiti!

The flattery suffocated him. It seemed so much pompous rhetoric. But the real sympathy in the eyes of the half-blind Carrière, of the mystical dreamer Mallarmé, affected him so deeply he could only stammer his speech of thanks.

So eager did they seem to get him off to the South Seas, that they organized a benefit performance at the Théâtre des Arts for him and for Verlaine. The lobby of the Vaudeville blazed with Gauguin paintings. The program announced short plays by Verlaine, by Maeterlinck, by Morice. There was also to be a reading of Mallarmé's translation of "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Symbolism was, at last, on the high horse. Naturalism seemed doomed. And Gauguin himself felt doomed as he heard the sinister words of Maeterlinck's "The Intruder."

"I wish I were out of this place."

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"Where would you like to go, grandfather?"

"I do not know where—into another room, no matter where! no matter where!"

And the poet who rose to recite "The Raven" croaked the dismal foreboding:

*"And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating
on the floor
Shall be lifted — nevermore!"*

The benefit performance turned out to be of benefit only to the Symbolists. The scenery and costumes of Verlaine's sketch ate up most of his profits. The few francs Verlaine received he used up that night in thirty glasses of "that green sorceress—absinthe." Gauguin received nothing.

Now he was ready for the plunge. He found his desires weakening, a strange fear enveloping him. He saw as if for the first time the horror of breaking the navel cord that held him to his native land. He was to leave behind him all his friends, all his hopes, all his familiar world. He felt himself propelled towards an abyss that would plunge him into a whirlpool of a new and dangerous life at the other end of the earth, perhaps to his death. It was not so simple to be an adventurer at the age of forty-three. Exile became a word of terror to a man who had become suddenly a personality in the artistic world of Paris. But he had given his word and there was no turning back.

But at bottom the terror of leaving for Tahiti was the terror of losing Mette. She had written him a letter which spoke very warmly of a brilliant Captain she met. Quickly Gauguin answered her.

"Yesterday I was invited to a dinner given in my honor.

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There were forty-five persons, painters, authors, and the Chairman was Mallarmé. There was a reading of poetry, speeches, toasts, and the best wishes for me. I assure you that in three years I will have hit something. This hit will be so hard it will allow us to live in peace without difficulties. You shall rest and I shall work. You will probably understand one day what a man you have gotten as father to your children. I am proud of my name which I will make big and I hope, yes—I am even sure of it—that you will not besmirch it even if you should meet a brilliant Captain! If you come to Paris I ask you only to be with good and simple people, and not with charlatans. When you come down write Morice beforehand. He is a bachelor. He will immediately help you to meet real, good people.

"I have been honored by the government with a formal mission to Tahiti and I have been promised 3,000 francs from Roujon when I get home.

"Goodbye, dear Mette, dear child. Love me much and when I come back we'll marry again. And so this is an engagement kiss which I send you today."

There was a day that Morice said to him:

"Now your struggles are over. You will be able to do your work at leisure in Tahiti."

Gauguin's face paled. He trembled.

"Let us go to a café."

They entered a deserted bar. In an obscure corner, Gauguin put his head on his hand and wept.

"I have never been so unhappy."

Morice was amazed. A strong man of forty-three—weeping!

"But why today, today when justice begins, when glory will come?"

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His face tortured with despair, Gauguin replied:

"Listen to me — I have never known how to keep alive both my family and my thought. I have not even been able up to now, to keep alive my thought alone. And now that I can hope for the future I feel more terribly than I have ever felt, the horror of the sacrifice I have made. Never again will I have my wife and my children with me — Too late! Too late!"

Then, attempting to put on a brave smile, he said:

"Let me alone. Do not try to see me for several days. That will be time enough for you to pardon me for having wept before you."

On April 10, the ship bound for Tahiti from Marseilles lifted anchor and the thump-thumps of the engine were immense throbbings, beating at the heart of a lonely artist.

CHAPTER XVI

PARIS IN POLYNESIA

TAHITI HAD about the same setting as Saint Pierre. There was the same mountain top, the same cascades rushing down to the sea, the same tropical décor of fantastic green trees, palms, and ferns. The same swimming waves of clinging heat, the same smell of unknown spicy things. The same market-place with its strings of fish, orange-colored bananas, yellowing breadfruit, baskets of mangoes, heaps of crabs. The Tahitian women wore the same print dresses resembling nightgowns, but instead of the foulard of the Martiniquans, they had white, fragrant gardenias in their long, black, wavy hair.

The arrival of a ship in that little Polynesian Paris known as Papeete is a gala event, for it happens but once a month. The entire town is shouting and waving on the wharf. The fashionable wives of the merchants and employees dressed in the latest Parisian mode, the colonel with his brass band and his soldiers, the brown-bodied men dressed only in a loin-cloth, the Chinamen in their pantaloons, the beflowered Tahitian women holding children in their arms.

The gunboat in the harbor fires a salute with a musket. The brass band blares out the "Marseillaise." The gangplank is lowered and the negro governor with an immense silk

top hat clambers up to shake hands with the captain. A swarm of custom officials follow him. They take special delight in pouncing upon a bizarre figure, dressed in yellow shoes, red cravat and immense green hat band. After poking through his luggage they ask him:

"Have you any money?"

Gauguin takes out a slip of paper.

"I am on an artistic mission from France."

Sensation! The power of a slip of paper with an official seal! A colonel comes on the scene with his white uniform and rattling sabre. He is apologetic to Gauguin.

"The governor is busy now, but tomorrow morning I will present you to him."

Everyone thinks Gauguin is rich and powerful. He is given every courtesy. The news spreads. A man is in Tahiti on an artistic mission. The Colonel helps him select a room at Madame Charbonnier's. His artistic mission takes on a mysterious importance. Perhaps this Monsieur Gauguin will inaugurate a new régime. At last France is waking up to the commercial possibilities in Tahiti. The Colonel introduces him to the Consuls, the exclusive coach builder, the Vanilla King, the only shipbuilder, the chief of the medical staff. Every introduction means a glass of cracked ice and a green bottle of absinthe, so that Gauguin feels quite gay when he dispatches a hurried letter to Mette before the ship sailed away:

"I even hope to make some money, something on which I did not count. I am to meet the Royal family tomorrow. That's fame for you. It's so stupid but that's the way of life. But don't think for all that I am an egoist and will abandon you. Those who reproach me do not know the

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nature of an artist. Why do they wish to impose duties on us similar to theirs? We do not impose our feelings on them. Many kisses to the dearest children and for you the best of your faithful lover and husband."

The following morning Gauguin climbs into a smart rig next to the Colonel. Off they go through grass-covered streets lined by one-story wooden houses with corrugated iron roofs. Pigs loll in mud puddles. Chickens run loose. Melancholy crows sit on dilapidated fences. The Colonel proudly points out the prison on the Rue des Beaux Arts, the hospital on the Rue de la Cathédrale, the Casino where the prettiest girls are to be met, the Cercle Bougainville where the best society drinks absinthe and plays dominoes. Gauguin has to remind himself that he is sixty-three monotonous days away from Marseilles on the most remote island in the world, to escape the impression he is in a provincial town in France.

At last they enter the palace of the governor. Soldiers salute before the iron-grilled gateway. Tahitian giants open one door, then another. Secretaries, seeing a stranger, straighten themselves up from their indolent positions. A wait of a few minutes. The governor is told a gentleman is waiting with an artistic mission from the Minister of Interior of France. Monsieur Lacascade, the mulatto governor, is a trifle disconcerted. He calls for an iced absinthe. He calls for his ministers. He puts on his white coat loaded down with brilliant decorations. The ministers whisper among themselves. The word spy is spoken more than once. Artistic mission! Who ever heard of such a thing? He is here to spy on the opium trade. Governor Lacascade has just deposited forty thousand francs in the Banque Agricole

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as his share in the annual opium graft. The governor tightens his greedy fist. Two more years and he'll have enough to retire in Paris. No dirty spy is going to foil his schemes.

Paul Gauguin is admitted. The governor reads the slip of paper. The ministers peek over his shoulder. The governor puffs up into a belligerent attitude as he hands back the paper:

"Artistic mission! Humpf! Let me warn you, Monsieur Gauguin, I will not tolerate any spying."

"Spying! I assure you, Governor, I am not being paid a centime. I am here as an artist. It is my ambition to be the first painter of the tropics. I am here to interpret the Polynesian world. I ask you for the necessary conveniences every artist should have—information—"

"Information! You will get no information!"

Twelve narrowed eyes level on Gauguin. He wants to laugh. He feels that if he barks they will all scamper off like rats.

"Idiots!"

Enough of this comic operetta. Gauguin turns his back and walks out.

But where was he to get the information about the Polynesians? Pierre Loti was satisfied to have a sensual love affair with a native girl. But he wanted to know the myths and the dreams of this savage race that he might bring them to the world in paint, that he might learn to be a savage himself.

He was to be presented to Pomare, the fifth, the last of the Tahitian Kings. Pomare would tell him the story of ancient Tahiti. But the King was dying, and with his dying

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eyes he could see from his palace window the bay dotted with canoes, orange sails against the blue of the water. His subjects were arriving from all the islands to mourn the last of their chiefs. He had deserted them, his own people. He, of ancient Tahitian blood, had allowed himself to submit to a white man's education, to a white man's command. He, who hated the French and who drank himself to impotence with the shame of selling his kingdom, already saw himself in his coffin in the uniform of a French Admiral. His dying thoughts, perhaps, went back to the days of his ancestors, two hundred years before, when Tahiti was Lotos Land, when his people were the happiest of any born under the sun, when two hundred thousand of them lived, following their pleasures.

With what love, then, did mothers bite the eyebrows of their infant daughters to make them grow long. With what tenderness did they roll their finger tips to make them taper. How they stuffed the girls with food, steamed them in closely covered sheets, flattened their noses to make them plump and beautiful and desirable for their life of love.

Boys grew to manhood in a perpetual round of sports — archery, surf-riding, wrestling, fishing, cricket, football. The tranquil starlit nights were glamorous with songs of ancient heroes. They played on bamboo flutes, panpipes, conchs. The girls danced the *upaupa*, a sensuous, maddening dance. There was a religious ceremony on the *marae* every day, when all chanted together and the spirit of awe was in their hearts.

They smiled as a matter of habit. They laughed frequently. As the women cooked their breadfruit, they hummed like the rise and the fall of the wind. As the men

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threw their spears at fishes they sang the sonorous notes of the roar of the sea.

Evil, of course, existed. Otherwise life would become too monotonous and cloying. Children were throttled at birth or else overcrowding would bring starvation. Boys of sixteen were cruelly circumcised with a torturing shark's tooth, but they emerged with a healthy stoicism towards pain. Priests, at times, sacrificed a human being to the Gods, but the victim was usually in bad grace and he never suspected the blow on his neck that was instantaneous death. Priests dared not be too tyrannical for fear of the secret Arioi society, who would laugh them out of their prestige as they circled the island with their entertainment of pantomime, song and dance. Once in a while neighboring chiefs would indulge in Homeric warfare, creating new heroes for a younger generation.

They were poetical for they spoke of such things as the depth of the sky, the unknown dark world, the line where the sea grows deep. They were contented, for the cruel injustice of the rich and the poor did not exist. They were happy as grown-up children can be with no inner frustrations and with the great beauty around them of giant trees, of colored sunsets, of an ocean whipped into foam on coral shores.

Then in 1767, that fatal year, Samuel Wallis accidentally sailed into the harbor of Papeete, hoisted the English flag and claimed Tahiti for England. Six months later Captain de Bougainville hoisted the French tricolor and claimed Tahiti for France. The white man was a God, master of thunder and lightning.

The idyllic days were gone forever. Syphilis, consump-

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tion and gunpowder, like three horsemen of the Apocalypse, spread death and horror over the Garden of Eden. But the fourth horseman was not long in coming.

The Countess of Huntingdon died in England and left her fortune to Christianize the Tahitians. In 1799, a ship sailed from London with twelve missionaries solemnly singing,

"Jesus, at Thy command, we launch into the deep."

There was an earthquake in Tahiti the day before the missionaries arrived. The Tahitian Gods quaked with the fear that they would be banished from their Heaven. The Tahitian, whose body was harassed with war and disease, was now to lose his soul.

In frock coats and top hats, the apostles of Christ brought to the wondering natives their magic of books, bells, and harmoniums, their planes, chisels and nails.

Not by Might, nor by Power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.

But the spirit of the Lord did not prevail. However loudly the missionaries preached and sang, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," the Polynesians laughed at them and brought dogs and fighting cocks to raise a rumpus. The English warrior and the English missionary joined hands. The guns conquered. The idols were burned.

"We rejoice that the Lord of Hosts is the Captain of the Armies of Israel as well as the God of the Heathen."

Pomare was crowned King, baptized, and anointed in Holy Oils.

A printing press was established and so many Bibles were translated into Tahitian that the animals of the island were almost exterminated to provide skins for the binding.

To possess a Bible became a raging fad. From all the neighboring islands came the heathen standing in line exchanging bamboo canes filled with oil for the word of Luke hot off the press. By 1820, one hundred and five thousand copies were sold for the price of three thousand nine hundred and eighty-five measures of cocoanut oil, ninety-eight hogs and ninety-five measures of arrowroot.

The English trader came with a business gospel — increase wants and stimulate industry. But how get the lazy kanakas to work? The reverends had the answer. Bigamy for men was punished by the penalty of building a road two hundred and forty feet long and six feet wide. For women the punishment was the payment of two mats. Within a short time a road was built around the island and ships were loaded with mats. The Polynesian would have his love at any price. He never could understand why the White God had such an incomprehensible objection to human pleasures. But the White God was master and they had to obey. No more were they allowed to dance the *upaupa*, to bathe in the nude, or to sing native songs.

The prohibition of their ancient joys brought despondency. Sadness detached them from life. A complete indifference took possession of them. And the missionaries, flushed and triumphant, wrote to their society in London:

“Now the people have a written language, a free press, a representative government, courts of justice, written laws. They have received the grace of God in truth, they have entered the regions of eternal felicity, they are walking in the fellowship and holiness of the Gospel, as heirs of Immortality.”

If there was one who spoke of the joys of Tahiti before

the coming of the white man, a "kanakipper," or spy, would see to it that he was hung on the loftiest palm tree. But the spark of pride and independence in the native chiefs brought rebellion after rebellion. Pomare the Fourth asked Queen Victoria to protect the island. Queen Victoria refused to be bothered with a savage queen on such a speck as Tahiti. A French Admiral came on the scene and threatened a massacre unless all submitted to the French. The noble queen of Tahiti, tired of bloodshed, accepted the protectorate of France. In 1880, her son, Pomare the Fifth, ceded all his rights to France for an income of forty thousand francs a year. His palace was the gayest in all Tahiti, but a gayety of dissipation and despair.

Half a thousand functionaries, Catholics, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Latter-Day Saints, found a comfortable living laying down the law, teaching the ten thousand half castes the fallen state of their souls. There came a flood of Chinamen to sell canned goods, opium and perfumes. By the time Gauguin arrived, in 1891, the Polynesian had learned to divide the whites into three classes—"He cheat a litty, he cheat plenty, he cheat too much!"

The King was dead and all night long thousands of natives, seated on the grass of the palace gardens, chanted their *himenés* of death with such feeling that it seemed to Gauguin they were singing the swan song of their race. Unlike the other Frenchmen, he felt the death of the King to be a personal loss. Who knows but that generations back the blood of a Polynesian had fused with the blood of one of his Peruvian ancestors? His feelings went out to the natives as they never could to any of his own race. He could not help but admire traces of their former glory.

There was the Queen Marau decorating the royal hall with flowers and festoons so tastefully that he declined the invitation of the Director of Public Works to take artistic charge of the funeral. How narrow-chested seemed the French troops that marched before the coffin compared to the brown Tahitians, tall and muscular, raising the dust with their broad, bare feet. How feeble the funeral sermon of the pastor in contrast to the deep harmonies of the choral chant. With what emotion the *vahines* sobbed as the coffin was sealed in the ugly monument that was built for the last of the Pomares. And with what lack of feeling did the governor sing in his broken voice,

*"Allons, enfants de la Paï'e
Le jou' de gloi'e e' pa'mi nous —"*

The pastors, the officials and the white traders returned home with the happy sense of a duty well done. But the *tanes* and the *vahines* walked home slowly, holding each other around the waist, as if realizing they would all soon follow their King.

More and more clearly, Gauguin saw the cold formality of his own polite race in contrast to the frankness and loving kindness of the children of the sun. The natives went everywhere, no matter in what village, no matter on what road, eating and sleeping in no matter what house without so much as saying thank you.

They walked with such grace and elasticity. How savage sweet the perfume of their bodies and the gardenias they wore in their hair.

There came a day when he was sick with bronchitis and a native Princess entered his room.

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"*Ia orana*, Gauguin. You are ill. I have come to look after you."

"And what is your name?"

"Vaitua."

She had a fragrant flower behind the left ear, the sign of a woman desiring love.

"It is very kind of you to have come, Vaitua. Shall we drink an absinthe together?"

His eyes noted her majestic, sculptural form, the arms like two columns of a temple, simple and straight, her generous loins, the cunning eye of a cruel animal. A true savage! They emptied their bottle in silence. She lay down beside him, rolled a cigarette and then, to his amazement, recited the fable of the "Ant and the Grasshopper," which ends with the ant asking of the begging grasshopper:

"Tell me what you did last summer?"

Said she to the beggar maid

"Day and night, to every comer

I was singing, I'm afraid."

"Singing! Do tell! How entrancing!

Well then, vagrant, off! be dancing!"

The Princess twisted her mouth in disgust when she thought of the ants.

"Ah, the grasshopper, yes! To sing, to sing, always to sing! How beautiful our realm was when nothing was sold here! All the year through the people sang.... To sing, always; always to give!"

Gauguin nodded sympathetically. She spoke for ancient Tahiti. To Gauguin, she seemed to speak of his childhood days.

His old, weary soul yearned for the freshness, the inno-

cent joy of a savage girl, one who would not even philosophize on the fables of La Fontaine. A few days later at the Casino, his eyes alighted on Titi. She was smiling at him. The tiare flower was behind her left ear. Her long, black hair fell loosely about her shoulder. There was fire in her blood. Her eyes and her mouth spoke of love. He bought two tickets for the merry-go-round and they went round and round on wooden horses like happy children.

However, when he brought her to his room, Madame Charbonnier protested that she was a respectable woman and she would not allow savage hussies to enter her house.

"But, Madame, an artist needs a model!"

Madame grumbled and Gauguin in a hot rage painted the glass doors of his room with nude figures to the constant horror of the respectable landlady.

The respectable folk of Tahiti became more and more insupportable to him. The sixty *fonctionnaires* of the department of the interior dozed over old newspapers six hours a day, wrote a report on the condition of their special two miles of road once a month, and drank themselves to sleep at the Cercle Bougainville every night. They despised the natives. Their respectable wives never tired of seeing the cinematograph at the Casino, gazing at the slides of the monuments of Paris, the portraits of famous men and scenes from Parisian history. They gossiped about their ailments and played dominoes. And, above all, found ways of expressing their distaste toward the natives.

Half the administrators were in Tahiti because of some disgrace at home. Gauguin, at last, realized why all the whites seemed to be suspicious of each other.

They were willing enough to play with the sickly half-

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caste girls who sold themselves in the Casino, but they would not allow a native to greet them on the street.

There was an air of dilapidation about the drowsy town as if it were under a spell like the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty. Not even the military brass band on the square could stir in the evening any sort of enthusiasm — nor the parading of the hundred and fifty seedy soldiers and sailors. Chinamen dozed in their stores fearful of the gendarme who would bring a new slip of paper with a newly invented tax of twenty francs. Their walls were already plastered with such papers. The bugler of the warship in the harbor played his tune every hour with the regularity of a cuckoo clock. At the Saturday night ball in the town hall, the ladies in correct French fashion danced the polka with their same, eternal partners. And all that such slogans as the glory of France, the white man's burden and the love of Jesus Christ did for the Tahitians seemed to be epitomized in the native women who sat before their houses gazing out into the sea like so many melancholy statues, and the sound of dry, ominous coughing that was heard throughout the night.

The fact that Gauguin was living with a native girl and that he seemed to prefer the company of the Tahitian fishermen to the whites brought him an immediate ostracism from the respectable set. In retaliation Gauguin pasted on his door for the amusement of the natives some obscene pictures he bought in Port Said. The news of these pictures spread through the white colony. It provided a week's gossiping at the Cercle Bougainville.

Gauguin was completely indifferent to the snobbishness of his kind toward him. When he thought of ancient Tahiti, the town around him filled him with horror. Where were the customs, the beliefs, the legends of the remote savage

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isle he dreamt of? He must go into the interior, strip himself of every mark of a civilized man, remove his trousers, wear a *pareo*, and gradually with patience gain the confidence of the Maoris and come to know them. Perhaps, all by himself, living their life, he would get under the skin of the Polynesian, and relight in painting the fire of their past.

CHAPTER XVII

PARADISE FOUND

IT WAS more than the past of the Polynesians, that pushed Gauguin deeper into the wilderness of Tahiti. It was the hunt of a civilized mind weary of the burden of learning and sin, longing for the grace, the goodness and the simplicity of the life of a noble savage. It was Adam yearning for his garden of Eden.

Gauguin fled into the wilderness of Tahiti, fled back into the garden of Eden to find the primitive innocence of his youth, of his ancestors — again. He went in all humility of spirit, humbled by his failure in civilization, hoping that all his rancour and surliness would be washed away by the crystalline flow of pure and sparkling nature. A great joy came to him as he sat in his carriage, his Eve by his side. She was proud and happy to be the *vahine* of a rich and important man, little suspecting the penitent of civilization that he was. The trivial chattering of Eve, the monotonous hoof-beat of the horse, and the tropic sun glaring on the green of the wilderness, the white of the coral roads, the blue of the lagoon drowsed his senses so that he lived between a waking and a dream.

He seemed to see nature in the very throes of creation. He recalled the Polynesian legend of evolution that he read in the compilation of Moerenhout. The coral gleaming so

white against the blue of the water was the first creation of Taaroa, the father of all Gods. Then came the worms and the shell-fish. Monster crabs with yellow and blue claws scuttled about on the black sand of the beach.

On the same sand were the twisted seaweeds from which sprung the jungle that marched up the mountain-side. Nearest the water were the silver-stemmed cocoa-palm and the metallic hotu-trees with their fat shiny fronds. Among the rocks higher up were the iron-wood trees with their mist of green-grey needles, sighing in the wind. Then trees without number: the bread-fruit, its five-fingered leaves like immense green stars, the fei with its cluster of banana-like fruit, apple trees and orange trees, purao trees and mango trees, and tangled through them all the white and yellow jasmin flower, the scarlet hibiscus, the intoxicating snow-white tiare.

After the trees—the creation of insects. Cicadas, centipedes, were everywhere around him, and the blue heron, the gemmed parakeet, the grey wood-pigeon, the long-tailed cuckoo like caprices of the God of creation. After them came the lizards rattling their tails. Then the swine; wild boars that could be heard crunching through the underbrush. And finally Man to inherit it all. Gauguin breathed in the vanilla orange-scented air and his old bones felt the same quickening to life as the palpable growth of vegetation around him.

It was late in the afternoon that they reached a row of bird-cage houses gay with rosy oleander and hibiscus.

On one side was the sea and twelve miles away the island of Moorea—a mountain of black rock like an ancient battlement. On the other side another mountain shutting out the world.



CREATION OF THE WORLD

PARADISE FOUND

Gauguin was back in the Garden of Eden. His pilgrimage was ended; but there was another to be made: the pilgrimage of his soul towards the grace of innocence. The man of the world longed to be the man of feelings. If only he could be like those large-boned, large-hearted Tahitians that smiled at him with all the good-nature in the world. He felt his own smile twist on his face.

The first few days was a spectacle of primitive life that held him spellbound. In the early dawn he saw lovers return home from a night of love under the palm trees, to build a fire for their breakfasts. Babies cried; little girls in tiny *pareos* plunged into near-by streams for morning baths. From his hut he could see bands of fishermen wading breast-high in water, beating it into foam as they sang, driving the fishes down-stream into a broad net. Others were breaking cocoanuts and burning the husks. Women squatted before their houses weaving mats as they chatted. The fresh morning breeze sang through the sycamore trees and caused the palm branches to murmur strange incantations. Men with axe in hand started out to climb the mountains to bring back loads of wild bananas and bread-fruit.

Noonday heat. The sand was too hot to walk on. Everybody crept into the shade and dozed off wrapped in sleeping mats. All sounds were crushed by the midday blaze and even words were spoken with an effort. All Tahiti, insects, birds and men, drowsed.

A few hours later the sun hung over the horizon. The utter peace of twilight. Only the cicadas sang. And fishes opened their round mouths at the tops of glassy lagoons. The air was sweet — pale blossoms rained down from flowering trees. Fires under red-hot stones in the ground were baking the evening meal. The moon rose, a round silver

disk, and rested on the horizon dropping liquidescent pearls.

Later in the night, the whole village gathered in the communal hut and sang wild piercing melodies. The sound of a concertina never ceased. The children of paradise found their greatest joy in dancing and singing and love-making under the stars.

Gauguin felt timid before these happy savages. How easily they speared their fish, dove into the sea to tear loose the shell-fish, climbed steep rocks up the mountain-side, carrying home two hundred pounds' loads of nourishment. Nothing was for sale except the coffee, rolls and tinned meats at the Chinaman's store. In the village of Mataiea everyone worked for what he needed. A privileged person was a desecration in this garden of Eden. The sophisticated Eve Gauguin had brought from Papeete seemed out of tune in this village of natural delights. He sent her back with the promise of soon calling her back. The natives were full of gossip about the *papaa*: the new foreigner.

A Tahitian girl, Mana, went into the white man's studio. But he would not take her. He showed her a picture of his white wife. Mana said she was very beautiful. And he drew a picture of Mana, the tiare flower behind her ear, dressed in a white robe. To spend an entire day drawing pictures is a strange way, thought Mana, for a *papaa* to pass his time.

The following week there was a note of disgust in the gossip. The casino girl had come back. He had the taste of a gendarme they said. But there was jubilation when Mana announced a few days later, "He has sent her back. She would not build his fire. All she did was to smoke

PARADISE FOUND

cigarettes and drink Pernod all day. He has come to know she is the woman who brought six men to their graves."

The white man became more friendly. He sat down beside the natives on the grass under the moonlight during the *himene* singing. He nodded his approval. His smile was more genuine. But a lone spectator who applauded did not seem to matter to them. They sang for their own pleasure and not for others.

Jotefa, the laziest young man of the lazy valley, deserted his family to watch the white artist hew figures out of wood and paint pink horses on canvas.

To Gauguin he proved a godsend. Jotefa would wander into the bush to find dead branches for firewood. He filled the kerosene tin with water from the brook and hung it from a branch of a tree over the fire to prepare coffee. He baked bread-fruit wrapped in banana leaves over hot stones. He brought mangoes and wild bananas from the mountain-top. One day he brought back a sack of leaves crammed with wild oranges. When he would tire of watching Gauguin paint, he would put his jew's-harp to his mouth and sing a guttural melody as he twanged the strings in measure. He would suddenly stop singing as a question popped into his head.

"How far to Paris?"

Gauguin tolerated every annoying question from Jotefa. In that way he learned more of the language. Besides, he loved to have a young man around him. It soothed the heart of a father, whose own son never wrote to him. It brought back to him his own carefree youth, roaming the seas as a sailor. Through Jotefa he would learn that spirit of living day by day, careless of tomorrow. Jotefa repeated, "How far to Paris?"

"Sixty-seventy days. Why?"

"The white people in Paris — are they glad to see me?"

The *papaa* smiled bitterly and shook his head negatively. But Jotefa answered:

"Some day I go there."

Gauguin tried to explain in the few native words he had learned. "Paris unhappy. Work all day. No air, no sun. No money. No marry. Love? Must pay money. Cost you lots of wine. Children come — must work, work all the time. No fun, no play. No money — then no food. Starve. Always must listen to man like gendarme. Must do what he say. Nobody love you. Paris bad!"

The *papaa* spat. Jotefa shrugged his shoulders incomprehensibly and leaned back to play another tune on his jew's-harp.

Once Jotefa said to him, pointing to a girl looking at his painting from behind his back:

"Take her!"

Gauguin paid no attention. He was afraid of the sickness Europeans had given to the natives. One thing the Tahitians did not understand. Why did the *papaa* work so hard — from the rise to the set of the sun — painting, painting. Why must he?

One night after the *himence* an old man with an ironic smile toward Gauguin proposed that the whole village work from sunrise to sunset and build more homes. There was a mock enthusiasm. Gauguin thought they were a good and prudent people. When on the following day he asked when the building was to begin, the natives smiled evasively. Gauguin realized that the joke was on him. Why build? It was the very carelessness in their natures that gave

them the gift of enjoying life day after day. Little by little he was catching on to the way of the primitive.

His sunburn had peeled and his skin was tan. He was nearer the color of a Tahitian. His neighbors began to treat him as if he were one of them. He saw that their way was to pass the day as amiably as possible. There was no sense of serious competition, no serious attitude to anything — neither birth, nor death, nor God.

Gauguin painted less and began to contemplate more. Europe would have punished him with starvation for spending a day in contemplation. In Tahiti one stared into the horizon many hours of the day.

One night under the palm trees Jotefa said to his *vahine*:

"Gauguin is a weak man. He gave me a knife to carve the wood. I said I am not like him; I am a fisherman, a builder of fires. I have not the same usefulness as he has. He had a tear in his eye. Why should he cry?"

The Gauguin who had felt an outcast in European society for eight years because of his art was told that he was useful. Another night Jotefa told another sweetheart:

"Gauguin is very strong. He climbed the mountain yesterday to chop down the hard rosewood tree. He climbed up the rock as I have seen no *papaa* do. He chopped the tree with madness as if an evil spirit possessed him. His hand was bleeding but he kept on chopping. He said to me, 'I had evil desires in me. Now I have chopped down all evil in me. I am a savage like you.'"

CHAPTER XVIII

TEHURA

THE SAVAGE Gauguin felt the desire to take unto himself a savage Eve. The degenerate taste for a sensual Titi — the casino girl — had been burned away by the hot clear fire of nature. He wondered how he ever could have admired the corseted pale *cocottes* of Paris. Living in a state of nature, the differences between sexes were not flaunted. There was something virile in the women and something feminine in the men. There was no mystery, no sadistic battle between the sexes. They were comrades, friends. Love was incidental — a manner of passing the night more pleasantly. The word vice existed only in the minds of the pastors.

One morning, bidding *au revoir* to his tearful friends who thought he was leaving forever, Gauguin set out on horseback like a prince in a fairy tale, to pick his choice from a thousand maidens.

Intoxicated by the sweet smell of meadow grass, Tehura, a girl of thirteen, was lying by a stream. It was her first year of freedom. No more was she at the beck and call of a crying baby, an order to build a fire, or to lace fish in a bread-fruit leaf. She was old enough to weave fine mats, and baskets. Her seven-year-old sister was now doing all the drudgery, leaving Tehura free to plan rendezvous with the boys of the village. She was to go fishing with them

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the following day, and she arranged secret meetings with two of them — one before the canoe ride to the coral reef — the other late in the night. What else had she to live for but love? What future could she expect but that of mat weaving, cooking and the constant burden of childbearing? And then almost all the older people she knew were sick: rheumatism or elephantiasis or consumption or the white man's diseases. Some day she too would sicken. She was still young. How silly of the pastor to preach against the ecstatic thrill of being seized by two strong arms and crushed to the chest of an ardent youth.

"Tehura." Her mother was calling her. "Quick put on your muslin dress and flowers behind your ears. I have found a husband for you. A rich *papaal*!"

A *papaal*! A white man! Her heart leaped. How envious the other girls would be. She helped her mother prepare the meal of shell fish and wild bananas. She wrapped all her belongings into a bundle: a thin dress, her mat, a necklace of orange-seeds and an elaborately woven colored fan. She looked at herself in a crystal pool, arranged her bushy, crispy hair. She was beautiful. No man had yet said no to her. She felt her power of winning any man.

The *papaa* was seated on a mat in the eating hut. He was dressed only in a red and purple *pareo*, wrapped around his loins. His body was bronzed and muscular. Almost like her own kind. His nose was shaped like a canoe, but there was sweetness and strength in his face. He smiled at Tehura.

"Aren't you afraid of me?"

"No."

"Do you wish to live in my hut always?"

"Yes."

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"You have never been ill?"

"No!"

The man seemed to be so shy and timid before her, like a Tahitian boy of twelve who is first learning the mysteries of love. She learned he was the man "who made human beings." The pastor had preached of him only a few Sundays before—that it was a sin to make human beings. He said it was idolatry. But what did she care for the pastor? She went to the chapel to make eyes at the young men and to sing the sacred hymns. She loved to sing.

The *papaa* mounted his horse and Tehura walked behind with her mother and her aunt. She stopped a mile farther on to receive the blessing of her godmother. She could always run away to her godmother if she was not happy with her own mother. In fact her godmother showed more concern.

She asked Gauguin, speaking as if for her own child:

"Are you good?"

The Frenchman smiled. "I hope so."

"You will make my daughter happy?"

"Yes."

"In eight days she must return. If she is not happy she will leave you."

There was nothing more to say. If the godmother were rich she would have prepared a feast and a wedding. But weddings made little difference. Sooner or later the *papaa* returned to his own country. If Tehura would only have a child it would be blessing enough.

Mounted on the horse with the Frenchman, Tehura left her native village without regret for her family or her two disappointed lovers. Life was a stream. There was no other choice but to drift.

TEHURA

At Taaravoa, half way to his hut in Mataiea, Gauguin returned the horse to the gendarme to wait for the coach.

The gendarme's wife surveyed the happy native girl with a malicious, envious eye.

"What! You bring back with you such a hussy?"

She was dowdy from head to foot with tumble-down corsets, imitation jewelry. She was pale and vulgar. Gauguin was ashamed of his own race. He did not trouble to reply. How fallen was the civilized woman with her cynical hardness in contrast to the sweetness and simplicity of a child of nature.

Back in his home, Gauguin held Tehura's face in both hands and kissed her.

"Do you know that I love you?"

Tehura laughed. The white man was so silly. She could not understand the sentimental eagerness of the middle-aged man to be loved as youth wants to be loved, utterly and with no restraint.

Love and hate and sorrow were but moods of a day for Tehura. How could she understand this strange man with his violent feelings, his inordinate ambitions, his complex, tortuous brain that had struggled for so many years with law and morality, art and literature, science and philosophy? From her very first day her mother had handed her casually to the care of another woman who was childless and wanted her. She had many women calm her crying spells, many men fondle her. For her there could not be any special love for her own blood or for any particular man. Romantic love and devotion were utterly unheard of in her land. Life was always easy. She was never hurried on to accomplish anything, or punished because she did not know her lessons in geography and spelling in the Protestant

school. She had seen and accepted, in a matter-of-fact way, as all her race did: childbirth, miscarriages, burial, pregnancy, death. She had known very little envy for there was no boasting of personality. All were more or less alike. There was no mystery. Sex was something impersonal. One lover had a little more art than another. It was this very casualness which so perplexed and delighted the man of civilization and violent passions.

But the Gauguin in quest of his youth was in no mood to be analytic or critical. He gave himself up to the romance of the tropics with all the ardor in his nature. The world-weary man threw himself into the primitive life of Tahiti as if it were a celestial picnic — a Paradise Found. The outdoor life brought a brightness to his eye, an appetite to all his senses. He arose in the morning with the sun; he plunged into a pool while Tehura prepared a breakfast of oranges, coffee, rolls and butter bought from the Chinaman. Tehura had no disdain for work. All her life she had prepared meals. Life without preparing food was inconceivable. It was the only housework she did, for no dishes had to be washed, no sweeping or mending socks for her barefoot husband. Time did not exist. One ate when one was hungry.

Tehura did not even have a wood pile. It was such a pleasure to hunt for wood whenever it was needed. However, she learned to keep a bit of rotten puraa wood smouldering by her side, for she smoked incessantly cigarettes made of wisps of juicy tobacco wrapped up in a flat spiral of pandanus leaf. It was only good for three puffs but it was pleasant to make new cigarettes. She had to be watchful of the Chinaman for when he blew his great yellow sea-shell, to announce he was off to Papeete, she had to buy provisions for several days. Sometimes a native walk-

ing to Papeete passed her hut while she was eating. She would call out the customary greeting:

"Haere Mai Tamaa!" "Come and eat."

He would call back: *"Eiaha. Tamaa Autou!"* — "No. Eat yourselves!"

It was courteous to ask and equally courteous to refuse, for usually there was very little extra food.

Gauguin felt almost a mystical communion with nature like that of the good St. Francis, as he allowed the mice to eat the crumbs on his mat at meal times. Even the processions of roaches and centipedes were not disturbed. Hornets without the power of stinging dropped from the pandanus thatch of the roof, as lizards beat them off with their tails. Sometimes a pig waddled over from a neighboring house and nosed his way to the food on the banana leaves with an air of authority.

Tehura showed her love of animal life in a different way. The daintiest dish for her was a green banana leaf full of skipping shrimps. She crunched the wriggling fish with her gleaming white teeth or let them hop down her throat with the greatest relish.

With Tehura beside him the years seemed to glide away from his heavy mind. Like a young lover, he took pleasure in showing her his strength and daring. One day he swam deep in the cavern of Mara, the walls mysteriously draped with roots, the water infested with eels.

"Are you mad? One never goes there," cried the frightened Tehura.

Mischievously, Gauguin sank from view to frighten her the more. He tried to touch bottom but there was none and he rose again, frightened himself. However, he swam for an entire hour.

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"Were you afraid?" asked Tehura.

"Frenchmen know no fear."

Playfully he picked a fragrant flower and twisted it into her hair.

One day a peddling Jew entered the village with his bag of trinkets. He held up a glittering object, crying:

"Pretty little earrings. Beautiful, only twenty francs."

Twenty francs! No one had twenty francs. One native thought of exchanging his horse for the earrings. Tehura looked at Gauguin pleadingly. The Chinaman had already taken most of his money from him. The Chinaman himself was struggling with his avarice to buy the earrings for a *vahine* he had long desired to possess. Gauguin said disdainfully:

"They are of copper. To pay twenty francs for such trash would be folly. No."

Tehura burst into tears. Gauguin bought the earrings.

That Sunday Tehura dressed herself to go to church. Her hair was oiled and decorated with flowers, but she did not wear the earrings.

"And the earrings?" Gauguin asked.

Tehura pouted her lips: "They are of copper."

But Tehura would not be Tehura if she were not like that.

After supper, cigarettes passed, and gossip of scandal exhausted, someone would start playing a guitar or an accordion. Couples would drift towards the music. A girl would take the floor, stand before a prospective lover and undulate to the rhythm of the music. The guitar was snatched from hand to hand.

As one girl sank in exhaustion, another took her place.

"Let's go to the banana grove," someone would cry.

TEHURA

And there the *upa upa umé umé* was begun again with greater abandon.

Men would dance and sing:

"Can we forget them, the women of Tahiti?

Each one is different.

They have pleasing eyes and they bedeck their persons.

They are indeed enchanting, the women of Tahiti."

Everybody would clap hands in perfect time.

"Who can prevent the pleasure of two bodies?"

The missionary might write that "the *upa upa* was an exceedingly ungraceful wiggle, involving violent exertions, till every muscle quivers and the dancer retires panting and in a condition of vulgar heat."

But Tehura would run home to put on her special scarlet robe and her headdress of *reva reva*, soft plumes as delicate as the airiest gauze, made from the threads of the cocoa palm leaf.

She would return swiftly to dance in her own manner, swaying her body backward and forward to left and to right while her arms whirled in the air, first enticingly, then threateningly.

Fermented palm wine was passed.

"If I had another lover

Or if you were here

How we would embrace each other."

A night of make-believe. A night of love. Grave, non-chalant dances. Voluptuous dances, comic dances exaggerating the ecstasy of love or the indifference of yawning lovers. More palm-wine. Lovers separated and walked away. Gauduin carried the intoxicated Tehura to their hut.

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Three times a week the entire village would sit in the hymn-singing hut to practice their religious hymns. But the hymns were sung more in the spirit of:

*"Come live and be merry and join with me
To sing the sweet chorus of ha-ha-he.
Ha-ha-he
Ha-ha-ho
He-he
Ho-ho
Ha-ha-ha."*

It was a chorus of melodious rippling glee in which everyone seemed to introduce any variant he fancied and the only unity was the droning undertone.

"What are they singing?" Gauguin would ask Tehura, who would double up with laughter.

"It is about Abraham and Sarah."

"What is there to laugh about?"

"Jotefa sang" — and she whispered an obscenity in his ear.

Their singing was without plan. Their hymns, like their lives, were ruled by spontaneity. Some one began a story, singing:

"David, come down and say how it is in heaven."

The song would end in an almost endless note, stopping suddenly with a final heavy *umph* and a burst of laughter.

It was so easy to laugh. The children giggled and screamed all the time at playing games, climbing cocoanut trees or chasing crabs. A comic gesture, a Tahitian word spoken with a French accent, a mimicry of a Chinaman

walking with careful steps would cause their shoulders to heave with merriment.

Gauguin saw them as naughty children of the Garden of Eden, always evading the efforts of the missionary, who was their God, to make them solemn and God-fearing. *No atou* (I should worry) they would say among each other, and Gauguin began to say "*no atou*" to himself. He had come to understand the mood of the Tahitian. It was time to put this mood into art. He had already made sketches and attempted several paintings. But the paintings reminded him too much of Martinique. Something was lacking. They were too near to nature. The colors were entangled in each other. He had an enormous eye for details but an empty head. He must dig more into himself.

He must bring more order, more serenity out of all the bewildering confusion around him. He could not find the courage to put all the glories of the sun in his pictures. He still felt the timidity of a race of people that admired academic painting. *No atou*. How different that attitude from the spirit of the suffering Christ and the melancholy Bretons. How would the Tahitians look upon Mary and Jesus? Mary would be broad-shouldered and statuesque, her huge, bare feet resting stolidly on the ground, the round, separate toes like so many pegs on a board. And Jesus would be an enormous baby — a kind of robust, healthy infant who would grow into a Gargantua. Add an angel with yellow wings to give a religious touch to the painting. Two native women in *pareos* of flowered cotton cloth, a mountain-side to bring in the blossoming trees, a dark violet road — an emerald-green foreground — banana trees. Simple, vivid patches of colors — no more. Beautiful, grave, naïve faces — a smiling virgin. The angel calm and humble.

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Green, blue, red and gold would flow into one another. Gauguin in one tremendous effort struck his richest ore.

"I am quite pleased with it," Gauguin wrote to his friend, de Monfried, in Paris.

Never since the days of the Gothic tapestry-weavers was there such a richness of color in Western art. He printed at the bottom of his canvas: "*La Orana Maria*" — (Mary, I salute you).

CHAPTER XIX

THE FISH SPEAK

THE GARDEN of Eden must have its serpent. Gauguin had three of them to disturb him out of his blissful life with Tehura — missionaries, mythology and money.

He became aware of the missionary when he tried to assemble three *vahines* in the nude for a study. They refused. The priest had told them not to pose in the nude for the man who painted human beings.

"You tell the priest if I hear anything more from him I will paint him into a picture being carried off by the devil," said Gauguin.

The priest laid the case before the bishop. A man who had the power to paint insulting pictures had best be left alone. The priest spoke no more of the sinful painter. But the mark of the missionary was upon all the Tahitians. At school, the first sentence that the children learned to spell and speak out loud in French was: "My soul is defiled with sin."

Half the natives, convinced by the missionary that dancing was a sin, looked upon the clandestine dancers at night as children of darkness. It was the custom to begin every *himenee* and every meal with a prayer. Even Tehura recited The Lord is my Shepherd, before going to sleep. Sometimes Gauguin would question Tehura on her religious beliefs.

PAUL GAUGUIN

"If God has as much might as the wicked devil why does not God kill the devil, so that he could do no more wickedness?"

Tehura shrugged her shoulders. Such problems were for the pastor. In a spirit of curiosity Gauguin went to church with Tehura one Sunday. He bought a black calico suit from the Chinaman and combed his tangled hair. The pastor, in a tall hat and black frock coat, with a hymn book and Bible under his arm, walked along the grass road to his church, nodding absent-mindedly with reverent gravity. Most of the congregation were already seated, their black garments in harmony with the dim light that penetrated through the rustling banana leaves outside the windows.

There was a suffocating acrid odor of coocanut oil, for all the good Protestants oiled their hair before going to Church. When Gauguin entered, whispering buzzes pervaded the room. The pastor behind the pulpit was not sure whether he had a convert or a scoffer, but the presence of the ungodly painter brought him to preach his sermon with an almost hysterical intensity.

No one, however, seemed to pay attention to the pastor. The heat made most of them doze over their Tahitian Bibles. Little children chased each other around the benches until a solid slap from their mothers brought them to a stop. All were impatiently waiting for the hymn singing to begin, while the pastor's voice droned on.

"Cleave to Christ as closely as the valves of the kai mollusk adhere to each other when touched by a foe. As the lobster forsakes last year's shell so does the hypocrite abandon the ways of Godliness. Just as the lily heals the

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disease and drives away the parasites of the breadfruit tree, so does faith in God bring everlasting health and joy. For do you not remember the story of Job? Satan and God fought for the soul of Job. Job had lost everything: his wife, his children, his fortune. There were boils upon his body and he was sick unto death. And the three friends of Job, inspired by Satan, said: 'Renounce God! What has God done for you? Sin and the glories of the world could be yours.' But Job would not give up his faith in God. And he was rewarded for his faith and Satan walked away shame-faced."

After the sermon the congregation repeated a prayer and after the collection plate was passed around, the pastor scolded his converts for their niggardly donations and trusted they would have more thought for God the following Sunday. With a sudden stir of animation the singing started.

Gauguin walked home strangely disquieted by the sermon on Job. He had a queer feeling that God and Satan were struggling over his soul: Satan urging him to renounce art and live prosperously, God testing his faith to his art with every possible disaster. Were still greater disasters in store for him?

However, his attendance to Church bore fruit in an invitation to a wedding. There seemed to be an undercurrent of scandal about it. The half-caste schoolmistress was to be wed to the son of the Chief of Pounouraou. The Protestant Bishop, it was said, was very anxious to hurry the wedding. For Gauguin, the feast was a revelation of Tahitian riches. Bamboo poles supported a canopy of pandanus leaves. Ferns and wild orchids were twined about the poles. A

hundred finely woven and stained mats behind layers of breadfruit leaves, surrounded baskets of food. Roasted pigs, chickens, feis, were placed on the grass in mounds. Great pots of shrimps, crabs and lobsters were steaming over a hot stone fire. Tons of oysters were begging to be eaten. Bananas, oranges, pomegranates and mangoes stuffed with a horny seed and fragrant fruit oils were piled near coconut shells filled with cold water. Brilliant raw fish were heaped in leafy baskets. Whole palm trees had been destroyed for the choice small handful of green leaves buried deep in their tops, prepared as a delicious salad. Ground coconut and arrowroot in huge platters made a pasty delicacy to be eaten with the twirl of a forefinger. Wines and beers and orange drinks. Exotic Frangipani, bougainvillea and creamy gardenias perfumed and spiced the thick air. The pastor said a prayer and at the signal of his raised finger two hundred hands began cramming, without order, taking everything within reach. The laughter was hilarious and contagious.

Remarks about the newlyweds were bandied about to the frowning disturbance of the pastor. A ribald, jolly crowd was too uncomfortable an experience for him and he slipped away in the middle of the wedding feast.

Gauguin saw that the pastor's influence was not too profound. Not so profound, he thought, as in the days when the hundred-year-old woman, sitting like a mummy beside the bridegroom's mother, was a gay and frivolous girl. So frivolous that she was branded with a tattoo mark on her cheek to be known as the scarlet woman: an indelible testimony of the fierce methods of the early missionary to subdue the heathen. But the heathen was not entirely subdued. The drunkenness, the lascivious songs and dances after the

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banquet revealed a race that still had fire in its blood. As Gauguin went back to his hut, with the reeling Tehura, obsessed with the tattoo mark he had seen on the old woman, he resolved to delve further into the mythology and customs of the Tahitians — the serpent of ancient superstitions — more powerful than any teaching of the pastor.

Little by little, Gauguin became aware of the *tupapaous* (demons and spectres that haunted the imaginations of the Polynesians). One dark evening he returned after a trip for supplies to Papeete to find his hut unlit. The lamp was without oil. Tehura lay face downward flat on the bed, her eyes as phosphorescent as those of a cat. She was so terror-stricken that she did not see him enter. Gently Gauguin sat down beside her. She stared at him and then, recognizing him, she broke into convulsive sobs.

"Never, never leave me alone without light," she cried.

What had she seen? The spirit of the dead, perhaps of her dead grandmother — a subject for a painting.

The following day Gauguin worked feverishly, drawing an outline of Tehura lying on her stomach showing part of her rigid, scared face. How paint her expression with the least detail and the most mystery?

Sombre, sad, frightening colors: violet, deep blue, yellowish orange. The linen of the bed would be yellowish orange suggesting a lit lamp, dim and mysterious. An awesome background of purplish violet splashed with flowers of greenish electric spark effect. At the extreme left the ugly face of an old woman, the *tupapaou* in the mind of the living girl. He signed it: *Mano Tupapaou* — Spirit of the Dead Watching.

With this painting Gauguin felt he was on the trail to the savage's dark regions of the heart.

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Tehura spoke to him of the plateau of Tamanou haunted by tupapaous. He decided to spend a night there, to frighten himself into a state of primitive awe.

Nude, except for his *pareo*, with a hatchet swinging in his hand, Gauguin started out before dawn in the direction of the mountainous diadem which crowned the center of the island.

"You must be mad," said Tehura, without much concern, for she was convinced he was possessed by a demonic *tii*.

He scaled mountain walls, waded through the rivers up to his neck, cut his way through thick masses of jungle, swung from branch to branch over pools laden with creeping horrors.

Sometimes, in the most remote places, he would pass lonely, isolated people, living in hovels, monstrous with the bloatings of elephantiasis or with leprous clumps for hands that had magically and painlessly disappeared.

He pushed his way under banyan trees with roots like slimy tentacles of a swampy creature. Over black, marshy earth, under gloomy groves of poisonous hotu-trees.

A bare-necked vulture, a *cou*, wheeled over his head, as if screeching for his death. Towards sunset he found a flat space covered with fern and burao trees. After a supper of wild bananas he lay under a tree to sleep. There was nothing to fear, for no poisonous insects or wild animals infested Tahiti. And yet, as twilight gloomed to inky darkness under the banana leaf covering, a shiver of apprehension passed through him. Though he was so tired he could barely move his limbs, he could not fall asleep. . . . A strange powdery phosphorescence hung about him and was palpably moving. Was he dreaming, hallucinated? Or was his mind

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filled with the many legends of the ancient Maori that he had read?

Before him seemed to stand the imposing Arioi, tattooed with licentious pictures in black and red, girdled with golden plantain leaves, and wreathed with the yellow and red foliage of the *hotu*, dancing and singing to a perfect rhythm, acting scenes in history — applauded, feasted, privileged to use the women as their fancy desired. "Fiends of the voluptuous haunts of Belial," free from the need of labor, theatrical stars of Polynesia, they roved from island to island supported by chiefs and priests. They sacrificed to the Gods the offspring of their revels and for them was the reward of *Rohutu Noa Noa* (Fragrant Paradise), where they would live in luxurious and licentious indolence and crime, possessed of everlasting virility.

Or again, Gauguin imagined he saw the Matumua — the enthronement of the King. A corpse placed before the idol of the God on top of the Marae (a pyramidal temple of worship). The King seated on mats as men and women entirely undressed dance lascivious dances around him, striving to touch certain parts of his body with certain parts of theirs. Multitudes in ecstatic madness.

The scene he next imagined was the death of the King when his head was cut off and hidden in a secret place.

A legendary world as rich in ceremonies and colors as Egypt or Assyria — a primitive world of huge enigmatic idols, waiting to be reborn in sculpture, in painting.

Picture upon picture flashed through the artist's mind, peopled with calm, fatalistic, tawny-colored children of nature against a background of jungle and gigantic idols. For it was a world that had reached the wisdom of fatalism; a world grown old beyond the illusions of childhood.

He recalled the last words of a story that Tehura had told him of the death-bed lamentation of a mother.

"Farewell, O my child! Do not grieve; do not weep; do not love; do not yearn for your parent left by you in the world. Go ye forever. Farewell forever."

He remembered the song she had crooned to him, the song that mothers had hummed to their children for countless generations:

*"Spoke then Hina to Tefatou,
Let man live again.
Then spake Tefatou,
I shall not let him live again.
The earth shall pass away,
Vegetation shall wither,
The food that men eat shall be consumed,
The soil shall disappear,
The earth shall be destroyed,
There shall be no more earth."*

Man must die so that one greater than he might be born. Spirit ever marries itself to new matter, in an infinite evolution of life. Legends that were more than legends. A stoic resignation to reality. Unflinching minds. He would put something of their nobleness — their grandeur of soul — into his painting.

After two nights had passed in rumination, Gauguin returned to his hut, feeling the relief of an artist who shapes the vagueness of his dreams into tangible clearness. For the first time he could see without confusion ancient Tahiti on his canvases.

Tehura noticed a deepening frown in the face of her *tané*. He worked frantically by day, and at night he was

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silent for long hours. He did not question her any more about legends of Taaroa, father of Tahitian Gods, or about Roua Hatou, the Tahitian Neptune who caused the great Deluge.

Tehura had learned to keep quiet when the "maker of human beings" was in a sullen, brooding mood and she took to weaving a little mat. But she was displeased. Of what use was a *tané*, if he had nothing to say? She began to wish for the powerful, handsome youths — men of her own blood — who more than once stared significantly at her.

The jinx that had suddenly come into Gauguin's life was the Chinaman, who brought him no mail. Day after day he would pass his hut about noon. Gauguin would lift his head up questioningly. The Chinaman would shake his head negatively. So often was this repeated that it finally became a form of greeting each other.

Seven months went by and there was no word from Mette. Not even from Morice, with whom he had left five hundred francs to be sent two months after he left Paris. He had but two hundred francs left. He would soon be without money. Had his friends deserted him? He could live on fruit and fish, it was true, but he could not afford to give up day upon day to hunting for food as the natives did. Not if he was to paint. And if he received no more money how could he buy paints and materials? If he had to give up his work, why remain in Tahiti? He had found the new subject in art that he had set out to find. It would create a sensation in Paris. To his surprise, Gauguin awoke from his trance of living the life of a noble savage, to a realization that he longed for Paris — for success — for Mette.

The thrill in playing the part of a savage as material

for his art appealed to Gauguin. But when he found that the only way he could survive was to occupy all his days with the food-gathering life of the primitives, the romance began to disappear with appalling rapidity.

The proof of it came in the sudden excitement in the village when the bonitos and tunny fish swept the surface of the waters. The jubilant excitement of the hunt seized the natives without breaking the melancholy cloud of his own thoughts.

Gauguin helped the Tahitians drag nets over the shallow waters of the coral reefs to trap bait for the huge tunny fish. But as he gazed at the iridescent flowers and leaves of coral at the bottom of the mirrored lagoon, coral that appeared to grow out of beds of precious stones, he seemed to see the beady-eyed, glittering serpent of money, mocking the white man who wanted to be a savage.

They went beyond the reefs far out into the sea in canoes tied together supporting very long rods. When Gauguin cast out his hook he had instant luck. The natives cheered him but he noticed that they whispered and laughed among themselves.

Homeward, he learned the reason why: his tunny fish had been caught on the lower jaw, a sign that his *vahine* was faithless during his absence.

As the twenty-two oars dipped precisely into the sea and the rowers uttered wild cries, while gemmy fishes leaped in the phosphorescent wake, Gauguin had the sensation that angry Gods were pursuing him. An inquisitive stranger had disturbed their ancestral slumber.

Tehura was awaiting him on the beach with all the women and children of the village. Each one held high a candlenut torch threaded on the spines of cocoanut leaves.

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Tehura greeted him with special warmth. His suspicions increased.

When they lay side by side that night, he said:

"Your lover, was he to your liking?"

"I have no lover."

"You lie. The fish has spoken."

She stared fixedly at him and her eyes filled with tears.

"You must strike me. Strike me many, many times. If you do not, you will be angry a long time."

But it was absurd of him to be jealous or angry. Why should he expect Tehura to be faithful to him, when he, in his mind, was faithful to Mette?

He kissed Tehura, not forgivingly, but sensuously. She was no longer the pure, virginal girl of the forest. She was a concubine with whom he had wasted six foolish months of sentimentality.

Came a noon when the Chinaman did not shake his head negatively. He waved a letter with a triumphant smile on his lips. It was from de Monfried. There was an old friend to be trusted.

Gauguin read the letter on the spot. Apologies for not writing sooner. Family trouble. Juliette was with child! Juliette, who was so devoted to Gauguin in his despairing days at the Café Gangloff of the Rue de la Gaiété. It happened in spite of everything. God knew the conditions under which he did it. The letter ended with "what are you doing?"

Three months before he would have written a raving letter about the charms of Tahiti and the savage life. But now—the sky was no longer serene blue, it was dull with storms. How could he rave about the food when he was

dying for a good *ragout*? The wonderful hospitality of the natives shouting to every passer-by—come and eat—was but the hospitality of a people who wished to be entertained by a stranger. They were good-natured and easy-going because they never undertook anything and so were never disappointed. What reason for them to be unhappy since they had no ambition? Their minds were free from complex problems; it was easy enough for them to remain simple. They showed no special enthusiasm for his paintings. Half the women were already contaminated by the missionaries with a sense of sin, and the other half would pose in the nude only under special inducement. A gift or love.

Gauguin was definitely certain he was living in a fool's Paradise when he had but forty francs left in his pocket.

The crisis he had dreaded for so long had come. The only thing he could do was to beg his passage home from the half-caste governor in Papeete. If only he could have stayed another year and brought home with him a hundred canvases the like of which had never yet been seen by the eyes of man. If only he could be like the Tahitians and say careless *No atou*, and go to bed, saying to himself: one more day gained, tomorrow I may be dead. Impossible! He was cursed by a *tii* more terrible than a Tahitian could imagine—the *tii* of an artist, who must create and suffer, or not create and suffer more.

CHAPTER XX

BEACH-COMBER

GAUGUIN FOLLOWED a path downhill to a one-story shack of unpainted boards. *Yalanna*, the slinky-eyed Chinaman, greeted him in his Tahitian for *Ia Orana*. With an expressionless face, the Chinaman took out a bag of coffee beans as usual. Gauguin shook his head. He pointed to a black suit of calico cloth. Gauguin needed a new suit for his trip to Papeete. The Chinaman nodded wisely. The white man was at last coming to his senses. How could he have lowered his dignity by wearing a *pareo*? The storekeeper held the black suit in his right hand as he extended his left for the money. The exile from Shanghai could not be too cautious. He was so despised that he would have no chance before the Chef du Service Judiciaire. Gauguin deposited ten Chilian piastres in coin, for the Chink distrusted paper money. With the black suit in his hands, Gauguin saw himself an outcast of Paradise, forced to compromise with the civilization he despised.

Tehura sobbed as if her heart would break when her *tané* said farewell to her. She felt the first pains of motherhood. Her first-born would never see its white father.

As Gauguin waved his farewell to her from the top of the coach she took the opposite direction to walk back to her native village, singing a little tune, suddenly finding happiness in a new sense of freedom.

For Gauguin the ride to Papeete was jolting and depressing. He saw himself go through the same revolting degradation of a proud derelict. He had alienated so many Frenchmen in Papeete. How was he to keep himself afloat except by begging? The pit of his stomach sank and his heart seemed to be playing him tricks.

Towards evening the coach stopped at the market-place of Papeete. The cocoanuts strung on wires looked to Gauguin like a collection of skulls of a savage chief. Civilization, the cannibal, would string him to a wire before long or tie him to some chain as the chickens in the market were tied to the legs of the squatting natives.

La Maison Brandère, where everything was sold from white satin shoes to ship anchors, from hairpins to harpoons, was closing its doors. Gauguin passed the Rue de Rivoli, noisy with cafés and grog shops, turned into the Rue de Pologne, where the Chinese tea houses were run by their Tahitian courtesans, and entered the house of Madame Charbonnier, who kept her respectability despite the license of the neighboring street. Disregarding the weak protests of his former landlady, Gauguin installed himself in his old quarters with the same assurance and insensitivity that he was forced to practice before all whose help he needed.

The following morning, more refreshed and reassured by his success with Madame, he considered his position more carefully. He hated to beg his passage home from the governor. It wouldn't do for the artistic ambassador to Tahiti. Nor could he work at odd jobs at three francs a day, a method which the natives used to earn some tobacco money. Besides, he felt certain that a banknote was on its way to him on some ship. It would be best to lie to until the very last. He decided to hang around the Cercle Bougainville

and borrow his meals from acquaintances he might pick up there.

Where floats the tricolor there flows the cognac. It was a queer stuffy sensation to sit before a marble table after so many months of wilderness. The world of jungle and sea and weird legends contrasted painfully to the mundane talk of trade and politics.

Every new boat brought a familiar face to him in the Cercle, for like the constellations, the traders of Tahiti revolved about the South Seas, certain to return to Papeete the same month every year. Gauguin was surprised to find his escapade into native life a well-known comedy to the cognac drinkers. They sat down at his table with a patronizing air that made Gauguin boil. How did he like this turning native business?

Gauguin would reply with an Olympian assurance:

"Whether I liked it or not doesn't matter. What I sought in art I found."

They liked his straightforward answers and treated him to another bottle of cognac. Cognac on an empty stomach had a potent effect on his tongue. He would warm up to his subject.

"You traders don't realize what you have in Tahiti. Some day the world will wake up to find the Garden of Eden is in a little island of the Pacific. When my pictures are shown in Paris, the world will see the Paradise that it has lost."

A group would gather around him plying him with more liquor. This Gauguin was a queer type and amusing when he was drunk.

"I am making history in art, and that is why I must starve in the bargain — the fate of all pioneers.

"It would be easy for me to make a fortune if I painted like the others. But there's something in life that goes beyond money. There is a certain mystery and wonder. We all have it when we're young. But we lose it. Everything becomes commonplace. If I painted in a commonplace way, you would say: that's good—it looks real. But an artist can't imitate—not even Nature. He has to go deeper. He must show you the world as you have never seen it before—you must be thrilled by his work and feel again that sense of mystery and wonder."

The *fonctionnaires* and the traders might have learned a great deal about the history of art if they had listened carefully, but they left before Gauguin finished talking. The one who remained out of politeness or amusement, was sure to hear in the midst of the discourse:

"Have you a five-franc piece on you until the next boat comes in?"

However, Gauguin found two sympathizers.

One was a Nihilist who had escaped from Siberia and who would say to Gauguin:

"You and I are misunderstood geniuses."

The other was the captain of the schooner *Louise Amelia*. It sailed under French, Italian, or the Chilean flag, depending upon the nationality of the man-of-war which was chasing her. It was this captain who first introduced the Chinese into the Island. He shanghaied five hundred of them and took them from Shanghai to Tahiti. Instead of dying off rapidly as they would have in the guano fields in Chile, the Chinese thrived and grew fat, and sent word home for their friends to come. Despite the reputation of the Captain as a pirate and a tremendous cheat, he was treated as a jolly good fellow everywhere. Once he said to Gauguin:

"You and I are outlaws of society. I am amiable about it and they all like me. You are bitter about it and they all hate you."

"I might not be so bitter if I made as much money out of being an outlaw as you do."

"It's too bad you haven't the price of a schooner. You'd make a first rate pirate. We could do a great business together in the Marquesas."

"Why the Marquesas?"

"They're so damn savage there you can do anything with them. I once kidnapped a whole village with a barrel of rum."

Gauguin pricked up his ears. So—a land more primitive than Tahiti! He had a leaping impulse to take the very next boat to this new island. One more year of painting in the Marquesas and what amazing canvases he would take back to Paris! But where was the money? Only another bottle of cognac could appease the seething anger within him.

He would walk home, far from steady on his feet, with an infrequent meal acting as ballast; but more often on an empty stomach. His friends would gladly treat him to a drink but to treat a man to a meal would classify him as a beggar. They spoke of him in the colloquial French of "he's off his nut."

When he awoke one morning he spat blood. His head became dizzy. He hurried to the hospital. Doctor Chassignol, who had emigrated to Tahiti to study the tropical diseases, could make nothing of his case. Mustard plasters on his legs, the cupping of his breast, nothing seemed to stop the flow of blood.

"I'm afraid you're done for, old boy."

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For ten stunned seconds Gauguin kept silent.

"Write my wife that my last thoughts were with her and the children."

But the vomiting of blood stopped. His heart had withstood one more shock. He took a digital treatment and he was once more on the way to recovery.

The doctor puzzled over Gauguin's illness and put it down as overexertion of the heart. The patient had roughed it too violently, gone native too recklessly. The doctor advised him to take things more easily and not feel so fanatical about his painting.

"You take things too much to heart," the doctor jocularly punned.

There was every reason why bitterness should be eating away his heart, thought Gauguin. His friends who had his money in Paris had deserted him to starve. He had written four letters to his wife without receiving an answer. The world looked upon him as a fool and a brigand, because he had more respect for his emotions than the conventions of the prudent life. He needed so little to be content. Just enough money to keep at his art and to have his wife and children with him. By some terrible curse that little pitance was never forthcoming.

When he had recovered, he walked with heavy steps to the Government House. There was no way out except to beg his passage home from the government. At the entrance he ran across the pirate.

"What the devil are you going to do in this galley?" asked the pirate pointing to the forbidding gray walls of the Gouverneur des Etablissements Français de l'Océanie.

"*Ma foi*, I'm going to do the most disagreeable thing

possible. I'm going to beg my passage from the governor. My ship is adrift and I'm on the rocks."

The pirate pulled out his wallet and handed Gauguin four hundred francs.

"You give me a picture and we'll call it square."

Gauguin's everlasting calmness broke down. He gripped the old fellow by the neck and almost wept.

"Hell! I've got thirteen hundred francs more; if I can get my wife to let you paint her portrait, the money's yours. But she's not easy to manage and it's a sure bet she'll want pearls instead. Look me up next month."

The pirate walked away. He left Gauguin gasping as if he had just escaped a terrible fall into an abyss.

Hope returned to him in a flood of energy. Four slips of paper made him want to shout with joy. He could return to Mataiea, and work like the devil on all the paintings that shimmered on his brain. Up with the top-gallant sail and on!

All his life it had been that way. He stood at the brink of a precipice and he never fell in. There was no doubt that some God was playing with him — a cruel God and yet a just God, who wanted to make a great artist of him.

CHAPTER XXI

BY THE SWEAT OF THY BROW

GAUGUIN TOOK the coach the following morning back to Mataiea and asked the coachman to announce his return to Tehura when he would pass her village.

And to Mette he wrote:

"Do not see badly my idea of remaining here another year. I am working wonderfully. Now I know the soil, and the Tahitians. It took me a year to really understand them. I can assure you that what I am doing has never been done by any one and it is absolutely unknown in France."

The year of preparation was completed. Now began the frantic year of creation. The idyllic vacation days, when he drank in Oceanic mythology and the Tahitian life through a haze of sentimentality, were transformed into days of herculean labor. Only by the sweat of his brow could he achieve the real Paradise he longed for: a successful exhibition in Paris and reunion with his family.

He almost broke his fingers to chisel "The Dark Woman" and "The *Tiis*" out of blocks of hard wood. He painted picture after picture with incredible rapidity: two Tahitians that seemed to be made of bronze, carrying luscious fruits; a woman lost in a dream staring out to the sea. "The Queen of the Arcois," "Woman with a Fan," "Women with Mangoes," the "Temple of Prayers and Hu-

man Sacrifice," "Delicious Earth," "Death," "The Words of the Devil," "The Harvest of Lemons," "The Flight," "The Cannibal Head." In them all he thought he saw his own powers, his own touch, that nobody else had been able to do. Characteristic were his brown forms silhouetted against forest shadows, the tropical leaves and fruits and flowers that glowed orange and emerald against a blue sky; the foamy edge of a curling wave seen between tree trunks, the sense of animal peace and calm, the fierce vegetation in full bloom, rotten ripe for decay and death! As Gauguin expressed this fruitful frenzy to de Monfried, "I have been working hard all this time and up until now have covered forty metres of good canvas with Lefranc & Co. colors!"

The four hundred francs were gone in three months, and again he found himself with fifty francs in his pocket, and not a sign of a bank note from his art dealer in Paris, or his friend Morice. This time Gauguin definitely wrote the Governor for a free passage back to France. His eagerness to make the four hundred francs last as long as possible, forced him to unhealthful economies. A diet of breadfruit and tea every day reduced him to skeleton proportions, and aged him in an astonishing fashion. All his worries over money had brought gray hairs and incessantly sapped his vitality. The Gauguin who had climbed mountains with such gusto the year before, dared not hunt fruit or fish for fear of sunstroke.

At last a letter came from Mette. She had sold several of his canvases, but she was hard up and so could send him none of the money. His reputation in Denmark was increasing, and he must send more paintings for an exhibit.

Fortunately, next month's ship brought him three hundred francs from de Monfried, and from the Chef du Service Administratif in Papeete came a notice that he could leave for Paris whenever he wished, but that the cost of the voyage would be charged to the Capital, the Colony having insufficient funds.

He made feverish preparations for his voyage home. He completed four new canvases at a swoop and sent them freight on delivery to de Monfried.

"My apologies; I cannot do otherwise!" he wrote.

Gauguin also begged de Monfried to wash them and to take care not to remove the paint nor the preparation; to varnish them, to moisten the backs of the canvases, to stretch them, to put the nails back into the same holes, and not to sell any of them for less than six hundred francs. "The Spirit of the Dead Watching," a painting which he considered his masterpiece, was not to be sold for less than two thousand francs. And, finally, those that de Monfried could not sell, were to be sent to Madame Gauguin, 57 Vimmelskaftet, Copenhagen, for his exhibition there. Gauguin felt blessed in having this loyal friend to whom he entrusted his very existence in the Island.

In a happy mood of flooding hope, he arrived in Papeete, and went immediately to the Governor to get his free passage promised him by letter.

Governor Lacascade received him in sullen reserve. He had learned that the artistic Ambassador was not a spy. It seemed ridiculous to him that a man with an artistic mission should find himself unable to pay his way home. The Governor strongly suspected the authenticity of the mission.

BY THE SWEAT OF THY BROW

"You cannot leave unless the ministry gives us a formal order."

The brass door of officialdom again slammed in his face.

"What! More formal orders? The director of the Beaux Arts will pay me ten times the cost of the voyage for a few of my paintings."

"Have you a contract to that effect?"

"Can't you see that I speak honestly?"

"There is nothing for you unless I get a formal order from the ministry."

The Governor bent down over his documents as if the interview were at an end. Gauguin had all he could do to restrain from pouncing upon the pompous ass like a tiger and tearing him to pieces. He did slam the door behind him.

What made him think of Aline after his interview with Governor Lacascade? Aline whose sympathy and love for him fortified the artist in him against the harsh disappointments of reality. She would grow up a timid and sensitive soul shuddering in a world of Lacascades. He must prepare her for the realities of life. She must learn to have a different sense of values from the prosaic Gads of Copenhagen. In the mood of a protecting father, he bought a notebook in which he would write advice from a father to his daughter, to be presented to her when she would grow of age. He decorated the cover with the beflowered head of a Tahitian maiden. Beneath it he printed the large figures: 1893.

In the first page he wrote: "To my Daughter Aline this notebook is dedicated."

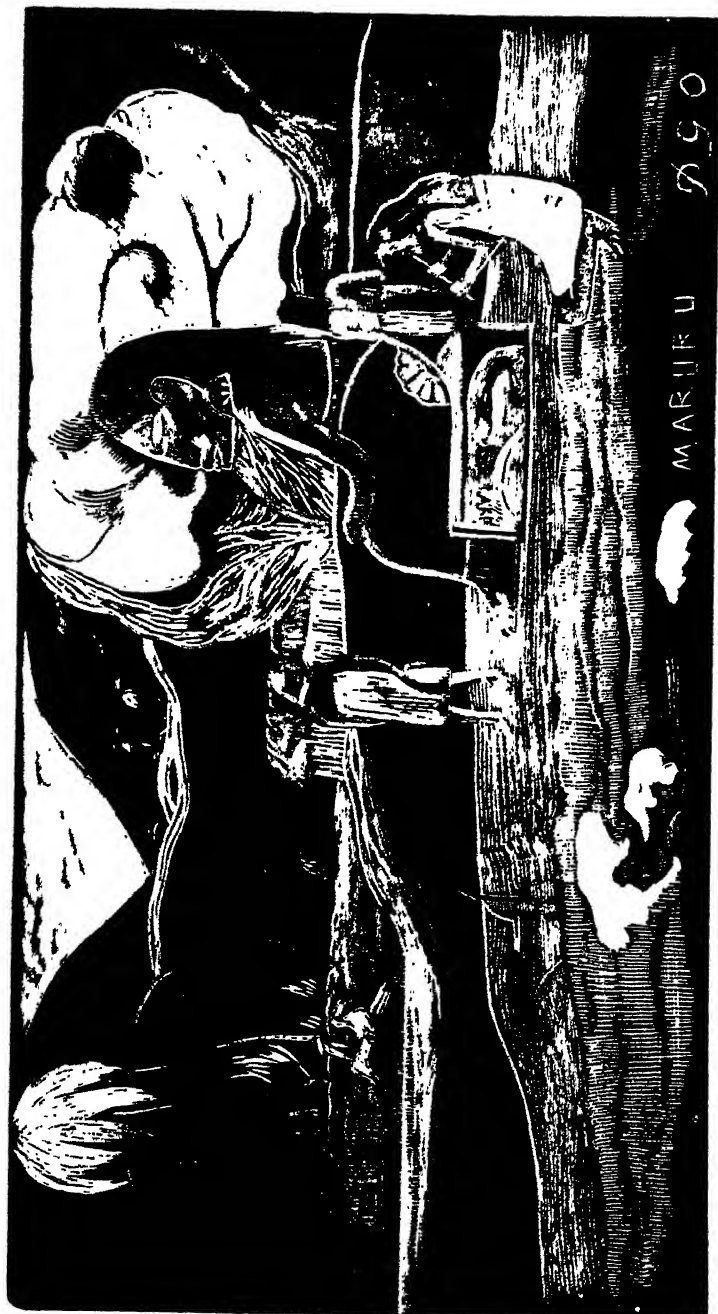
"Short notes without sequence like dreams, like life, all composed of fragments."

The first words he copied in the notebook were an acclaiming article on himself by Jean Dolent.

Aline knew he was a great artist but it would reassure her the more to know that a great contemporary critic had proclaimed her secret thoughts. She needed reassurance, living within a family that considered him a failure.

Back in Mataiea he began once more the struggle to paint beautiful idyllic pictures on a poverty-stricken diet. Tehura visited her people more and more frequently. She was sure of a satisfying meal there. Her rich *tané* who the year before had treated her to rare drinks and chicken now gave her only ten francs a month for tobacco, soap and a *pareo*. Gauguin held on to his remaining two hundred francs with a convulsive grip. He would die of shame if he had to beg again as he did in Papeete. He prayed for a bank note or the order of repatriation. But his funds kept on diminishing at the Chinaman's, who supplied him his daily bread. Native friends might bring him a little fish or fruit but he could not expect them to take care of him since they hardly exerted themselves for their own needs. In the meantime the painting must go on. To be as hard as stone means to be as strong as stone, he said to himself.

"You are right, my friend," he wrote de Monfried. "I am a strong man who can bend fate to my will. I can tell you, to do what I have done for five years is a great achievement! To say nothing of my struggle as a painter — and that was nothing small — but of my struggle to live, and with never a chance. Sometimes I wonder that something doesn't break, I hear so much cracking. Well, we must



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always go on; there is ever the great remedy in the end."

And in the notebook to Aline, he wrote:

"It is said that God put a piece of clay into His hand and created all that you know. The artist, in his turn (if he wishes really to make a divine creative work), must not copy Nature, but use the elements of Nature and create a new element.

"In the phrase, 'Increase and Multiply,' there is something of that. Increase means become strong. Multiply means enlarge creation by means of a new creation.

"...A true painter always feels a certain reticence in borrowing beauty from another. It is not the subject that must be beautiful, but his work."

Letters began to come more frequently. Never a magic bank note in any of them—but words that he treasured, for they came from his near ones. And yet words that tormented him in his poverty. Words that required a continual justification on his part.

A letter from de Monfried stated that Schuffenecker had complained of his character.

"So he's been complaining of my character to my wife! God knows whether I really have such a bad character. You have been able to judge for yourself."

Mette had to be continually reassured so that the hope of their reunion might never die.

"I am an artist, and you are right. You are not crazy. I am a great artist, and I know it. It is because I know it that I have endured so much suffering, otherwise I would consider myself a brigand—and that I am to many persons. But what does it matter? What makes me furious is not misery, but the continual obstacles to my art.

"You say I am wrong to remain so far away from the artistic center. No, I am right. I have known for a long time what I do and why I do it. My artistic center is in my brain, and not elsewhere, and I am strong because I have never been put off the track by others.

"Beethoven was deaf, blind, isolated from all. His works reveal the artist who lives in his own planet. But look at Pissarro: because he wished to be always in the front, in every current, he has lost his personality and his entire art lacks unity. He followed every movement from Courbet and Millet up to these young chemists who accumulate little points. No, I have one goal and I will always follow it! I alone am logical, and therefore very few follow me a long time. Poor Schuffenecker, who reproaches me for being so fanatical in my will.

"But if I did not act like that, could I endure for even a year the terrible struggle that I have embarked upon? My acts, my paintings are always denounced, but in the end they say I am right. And always the same situation. The conditions in which I work are unfavorable and it is necessary to be a colossus to do what I do under these conditions. You hate these problems of an artist because it has caused you a lot of pain and worry, and everybody paints rosy pictures to you of other professions. If there are a few lucky ones in the business world there are plenty of others who get nothing out of it. While art, in the long run, has its glorious day. It is little, it is true — but admit, at bottom, you are flattered to be the wife of a famous man. Because I have had to deprive myself of food, my stomach has contracted atrociously, and I get thinner every day. But it is necessary that I continue to struggle, always, always. And

the fault lies with society. You have no confidence in the future, but I have great confidence. Otherwise, I would have thrown up the struggle long ago. To hope is to live. When I eat my daily dry bread with a glass of water, I come to believe it is a beefsteak."

It was a letter to buck up Mette's courage, despite his own utter despair. For the third time he found himself with only fifty francs. It was no use. In eighteen months, since he left Paris, he had not made a cent. There was only one conclusion to draw. He could not hope for an inheritance. It was true he would bring back pictures, but since they were better than ever before, they would be less salable. He would have to give up painting as a career.

To complicate matters the more, he received a letter from Juliette. The baby was getting along marvelously. What a mix-up! Lady Poverty never tired of laying traps for him. And Puvis de Chavannes painted her so humble, so beautiful and so spiritual. She was an ugly old hag. Leave it to Chavannes to know how to appeal to the crowd.

Then came information from Joyant, his art agent, that made him writhe in agony. Joyant had sold one of his paintings for one thousand francs two years before. Joyant had given 853 francs of it to Morice, who was to have sent it on to Gauguin way back in May, 1891. That meant that the Symbolist poet had swiped 1,353 francs, including the 500 francs that was a personal loan from Gauguin. Enough to have made his second year in Tahiti the same blissful fantasy as the first year. God, how could Morice have done such a thing? When he would return there would be a mighty reckoning.

News came of the death of Aurier, the one great critic

that had boosted his works from the beginning. With Theodore van Gogh and Aurier dead, there was no one of influence left to acclaim him.

And then came the tidings of a terrific disaster that made his own misery easier to bear. Port de France, Martinique, was completely swallowed by a volcanic eruption from Mont Pelée. Poor Zephyrine! Poor Marie! How good and kind they had been. Now only a starving painter in Tahiti to remember them.

As despairing as existence was, Gauguin must paint. He must always reassure his wife. Perhaps Chavannes, who was receiving such important commissions to paint the Pantheon, might help him get a position as an inspector of design.

"That would be happiness for us, dear Mette, the assurance that our old days will be reunited with our children."

Mette's letters became more and more caressing. Was it because she felt the need of being pardoned for some sin? A woman who passes youthful years away from her husband can have moments of desire: of the flesh as well as of the heart. But perhaps it was because he was selling so well in her Denmark. She sold a little Breton head, from his Brittany period long before, an insignificant study, at a profit of nine hundred francs. An article in the "Revue Contemporaine" had two photographs of his work.

He also learned with pride that his son Emile was six feet tall at only eighteen and a half. "Great Gauguin," he wrote jocularly, of Emile to Mette, but why did not that great son of his write him a few words? How greedily he would have read them! How they would have lightened his burden of hunger and poverty! However, he was working

his way towards his family. Every new painting meant a hundred miles nearer to his flesh and blood.

While he was struggling along with his daily ration of bread-fruit and tea, Tehura gave birth to a boy strongly resembling him. He seemed to be sowing everywhere. In Europe the new baby would have been doomed to starvation, but there were eight thousand Tahitians eager to raise his boy as their own. In him was born a new tenderness for Tehura, the mother of his child.

In his notebook to Aline he wrote:

"In Europe human mating is a consequence of love. In Oceania love is a consequence of mating. Who is right?"

Juliette and his baby in Paris, Tehura and his baby in Tahiti, Mette and the children drawing him towards Copenhagen; no money from Morice or Joyant; it was enough to bring the sweat to his brow. But another blow struck him down to a greater misery. A cyclone smashed the bamboo huts of his village against the palm trees. This time the government came to the rescue. Gauguin found himself a refugee in the barracks of Papeete until his landlord would rebuild his studio.

A charity sale and a lottery were organized. Gauguin offered to paint a portrait as a prize in one of the lotteries. The Tahitian girl who won the prize and sat to her portrait was only too glad to be rid of it to a marine officer for ten sous.

The boat of April, 1893, at last brought him money from de Monfried, who had made frantic calls all over Paris to collect the debts due to Gauguin. Schuffenecker contributed a loan, which was a source of irritation to Gauguin. He thought Schuffenecker a type that should have remained

in the brokerage business and become a gentleman proprietor of a five-story house. But Schuffenecker had other illusions of grandeur. And the fact that Gauguin was making his mark in the world galled him. Gauguin wrote of him to de Monfried:

"He wishes to walk alone and reproaches me for not having pushed him along. All this is sad and, above all, petty."

Although Schuffenecker considered Gauguin proud and ungrateful, he could not get him out of his mind.

The money had come in the nick of time. Gauguin was exhausted. He was even too tired to take his longed-for trip to the Marquesas.

"In my two years' stay I have turned out sixty-six canvases of varying quality and some ultra-barbaric sculpture. It is enough for one lone man."

With the same boat he received a permit from the minister in Paris, allowing him to return on a man-of-war without cost. His voyage home assured and a thousand francs in his pocket, he could at last hold his head high. To cap the climax he received a letter from the governor.

"The Governor demands of Monsieur Gauguin his presence to make his portrait."

The governor had seen the portrait of a Tahitian girl in the cabin of the marine officer, who had bought it of the lottery winner. He was so pleased with it he asked for the name of the artist. And to his amazement he learned it was the painter-ambassador to Tahiti. The artistic mission of a man of such talent must have really been sponsored by the Director of the Beaux Arts.

He ought to make amends. He had the letter sent to

have him paint his portrait. But the governor's dark face turned almost pale when he received a single line from the artist-ambassador:

"I am not a painter of animals."

The commandant Clergeau of the man-of-war *Zélée* was advised that he was to accept a derelict — Paul Gauguin by name — to be transported to Marseilles. On the day of departure the commandant was astonished to see his crew wheeling boxes of all shapes and sizes up the gangplank, filling up three cabins. The derelict, dressed only in a *pareo*, followed behind.

"What do you call this?" asked the startled commandant.

"My paintings. They are worth a fortune," proudly answered the man in the *pareo*.

He had spent half his money in buying up all the curios in Tahiti. He could not resist the vision of having a South Sea studio in Paris. He thought to arrive in grand style but the trip home proved to be one of continual expenditures. The man-of-war cruised only to Noumea and Gauguin was forced to stay there twenty-four days. The hotel and storage charges were expensive. At last the passenger boat arrived and three hundred troopers were piled into the cramped third-class quarters with him. There was not even space to walk. The heat, odors and the food were intolerable. He paid the rest of his money to move into second-class quarters.

When Gauguin arrived in Marseilles and sent telegrams for help he only had four jingling francs in his pocket. Twenty-four years before, as a sailor, he had been in a similar predicament. But the forty-five-year-old beachcomber

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took his lot more stoically than the young sailor. His very nearness to his family was a balm to the stranded middle-aged man. In a spirit of jubilant youth he wrote to Mette:

"You will get your wedded half to embrace, who, if I do not exaggerate, is not a skinned cat and not a weakling."

CHAPTER XXII

ADAM WITHOUT EVE

THE TELEGRAMS came back to him at Marseilles. Joyant had disappeared for the summer, and de Monfried was sweltering in Algiers. However, one of the marine officers who had accompanied him from Papeete, came to the rescue with the fare to Paris and a little over. The concierge of de Monfried's studio was told long before to expect Gauguin. She opened de Monfried's bare studio for the stranger. Mon Dieu, how brown this white man was! Gauguin was very proud of his color. It would be vivid evidence to his more timid friends of his life as a savage.

But his friends were nowhere to be found in Paris. Even Schuffenecker was away. They had all fled to the country or the sea for the summer. What Gauguin expected to be a haven turned out to be a desert. To whom was he to turn for money? If it weren't for Schuffenecker, de Haan and de Monfried, how could he have survived the barren periods between the sales of his pictures? The penniless artist expected help from his more fortunate friends as a thing understood among noble souls. If an artist received no patronage, what a meagre history art would have.

Why wasn't Mette in Paris to meet him? She had made several thousand francs on his paintings the last half year — surely enough to take a few days off to greet her husband. She might at least have written him.

"Your silence is far from being affectionate. Is Emile so busy he cannot write a few words to his father? At his age I used to write to my mother when I was away and I knew how to find some affectionate words for her. Of course, I was brought up differently, with less calculation and a little more heart. As usual I am working and struggling, since I have no more money. Of Morice, not a word. I dare not write to you, not knowing what to say and what to think."

His only recourse was to his art agent, Boussod, even though Joyant was away. It was two years since he last entered the gallery where hovered the ghost of Theodore Van Gogh. Surely the art public must be fed up on the traditional painters. It was time that the group Theodore Van Gogh fathered so assiduously should come into its own. So much had happened in two years.

The ladies had changed their taste in dress. Their waists were strapped tighter than ever and their sleeves puffed up like balloons, at the shoulders. Montmartre, the hilltop overlooking Paris that used to be the artists' refuge, had become the foothold of the Church after the inauguration of the towering Eglise de Sacré-Cœur. The idols of yesterday had fallen to the dust with the jail sentence of Ferdinand de Lesseps and Eiffel—the evil geniuses of the Panama scandal. Although the Prix de Rome had been given to an academic painting, "Job and his Three Friends," the critics were becoming more apprehensive over the growing indifference to the science of design and composition. A coming change was in the air.

But the men in Boussod greeted him with a polite indifference. Oh, these hard, unsympathetic Europeans. How warmly his neighbors in Mataica welcomed him despite

all his sickness and poverty in every return from Papeete. What was worse — Joyant had not merely taken a vacation. He had quit Boussod's, disgusted with their conservatism, and he had taken with him all the Gauguins. The devil! He seemed to have no end of hard luck. As an afterthought, they handed him a letter. It had been lying around for a few days. Gauguin tore it open. His uncle had died and he was the sole heir. What a queer destiny was his — always to be saved at the last moment! On the strength of the letter, he borrowed some money and took the first train to Orléans, the city of his youth.

His good uncle Zizi! How clearly he remembered the time he lived in his grandfather's house in Orléans. He was seven and his uncle once saw him stamping and flinging the sand all about him.

"Well, little Paul, what's the matter with you?"

And little Paul stamped all the harder, saying:

"Baby is naughty."

Yes, baby had been naughty ever since, and baby was infinitely grateful to the good uncle who had left him 13,000 francs despite his naughtiness. Now he would be naughty no longer. He wrote Mette of his good fortune, telling her to hurry to Paris with the children. At last they could be reunited. The inheritance and the undoubted success of his exhibition of Tahitian paintings, would compensate for the misery of their separation, and life from now on would proceed in a secure and even trend.

On his return to Paris, he found a letter from Mette. She had not yet heard of the inheritance. It was a rather discouraging letter. His Tahitian exhibit in Denmark was a success among the artists, but the public would not pay

a centime. Not one picture was sold. That looked bad for his Paris exhibition.

In the meanwhile, his inheritance would not come in for several months, and he needed money immediately. He had almost forgotten the director of the Beaux Arts in the confusion of his first days in Paris. Ary Renan, the director, had promised the official purchase of some of his paintings. He left some of his best canvases at the Beaux Arts and awaited an interview.

The Beaux Arts had a new director, M. Roujon, but still there was nothing to fear. It was M. Roujon's duty to encourage the artists of France and surely he would help an artist who had been struggling for fifteen years. When Gauguin was ushered into the office of the august director, he felt a sense of constraint. The statuary in the corners were insipid "Cupid and Venus" pieces, and the paintings were the pretty, polished nymphs of Bougereau. The Director came directly to the point.

"Monsieur Gauguin, I cannot encourage your art, which revolts me and which I do not understand. Your art is too revolutionary and it would cause a scandal in our Beaux Arts, of which I am the director."

Gauguin smiled tightly. He was anxious to compromise with the world. He was soon to be a respectable citizen with a wife and four children. It was necessary to be polite.

"But, Monsieur Roujon, art cannot always remain static. Revolutions are necessary to bring new life into art."

"I see nothing in your painting to classify it as art."

"Still, Monsieur Renan was eager to encourage my art and he promised me an official purchase of three thousand francs when I returned."

"Have you his word in writing?"

Gauguin's limit of politeness had been reached. So it was a fact that such a cultured gentleman as the director of the Beaux Arts was less honorable than even the common people of the slums, and his word was of no value without a signature!

"Monsieur Roujon, it is useless for me to waste any more words."

He was going to add "with an *ignoramus*" but the vision of Mette restrained him. He must be less violent in his expressions. A hypocritical politeness was the law of society.

De Monfried was expected any day. He must find a studio for himself. He had still a lot of work to do on his paintings. The cheapest studios were to be found in Montparnasse. The fashionable artists monopolized Montmartre, and were making it expensive. But even his Montparnasse landlady at 8 Rue de la Grande Chaumière wanted money in advance. She had too much experience with those lazy, good-for-nothing artists who ought to be earning a living instead of destroying the plaster on the walls with their wild parties. Another dilemma! He recalled Vincent van Gogh's exchange of pictures for money at a milk-shop near by. The pathetic Vincent of the Pink Shrimps! Madame Caron, who ran the milk shop, proved amiable about the exchange. She gave him the first month's rent for a picture.

"My canvases are my fortune," she said. She had an attic full of Van Goghs, Guillaumins, Pissarros, Cézannes, and what nots. They were accumulating dust, but Madame Caron had patience.

Gauguin ransacked de Monfried's studio to help supply his own. All he could remove was an easel and a chair.

At the age of forty-five, he did not even have the necessary tools and supplies of a painter. The fact that thirteen thousand francs were coming to him lent a certain pathetic comedy to his situation. What if he never had that inheritance?

He must prepare for his exhibit. Durand Ruel was beginning to sell the Impressionists—the Pissarros and Guillaumins. Perhaps they might go a step further and try to sell a Gauguin. Durand Ruel was interested. His Tahitian work might prove a good selling novelty, they thought. They promised to see his canvases within a few weeks.

But why did he not hear from Mette? Was her mother talking to her again? He hastily wrote another letter.

“Why do you not come with little Paul to Paris? It will rest you a little, and I will be so happy to embrace you. Besides, we will be able to talk, and we have need of it.”

He received a letter from de Monfried with Juliette’s address. He had not embraced a woman in four months. Artist that he was he craved a woman to whom he could be a spoilt and favorite child—a mother-woman who would sacrifice everything willingly for him and demand little in return. Mette’s strange silence only aggravated this desire. But Juliette with a child was no longer the Juliette of old.

She gave all her heart and soul to the child. She realized the status of a mistress in France. She had no claim on Gauguin legally. She was delighted to see him, but Gauguin was hurt not to receive all the affection he expected of Juliette. A mistress with a baby was no longer a mistress. Manet had married his mistress only to legitimize his child. But since it was impossible for Gauguin to marry Juliette, he only felt the responsibility of helping

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her support the little one. His children in Tahiti were sure of all the attention and love that an entire village could lavish on them. But the baby in Juliette's arms had only her mother to care for her. He left Juliette in a friendly understanding that he would send her money as soon as he received the inheritance.

At last the lawyer placed the money in his hands. But at the same time there came a letter from his sister in South America demanding half the inheritance. He had not seen her since he left Peru at the age of five. His mother had left her behind expecting to be back within the year. His sister had lived a life of luxury, from that time, among her wealthy relatives. She was married and prosperous. She had never expressed a desire to come to Paris to see him. Was her demand justified? He placed the matter in a lawyer's hands.

Still, not a word from Mette. Should he go to Copenhagen to see her? But he had vowed never to enter the house of his mother-in-law again. But why didn't Mette take a step to see him? She knew his proud nature; the terrible restraint which prevented him from making the first advances in love. She must have regressed into the tightness and coldness of a puritan Dane. Chilled by the continual silence of Mette, he made a flying trip to Antwerp, and Bruges to forget himself. There he could see paintings he had never seen before. For days he stood before Memlings in admiration. But the vastly popular Rubens was too naturalistic. Anything that resembled Nature too closely was taboo to him.

He returned to Paris eager for his own exhibition. But he could not get Mette out of his head. He was in a generous mood. He had written de Monfried, "Now you need

not worry about cash." Once more he sent Mette a pleading note.

"Decidedly, I am more and more in the dark. You have my address in Paris and you have not yet found the means of writing a word. Everyone in Paris asks me how you are and I do not know what to say. Frankly, what's the matter? Why don't you and Emile come to Paris to say hello to me? You could not be so dead for that."

Durand Ruel was impressed by his paintings and promised him a showing in November. They suggested Morice to write the preface to the catalogue. Morice, at last, turned up. They greeted each other with restraint.

"You have become astonishingly young," Morice began in a flattering vein.

"Yes, two years older and twenty years younger, provided I don't lose in twenty days of Paris my Oceanic youth."

His worry over Mette was rapidly creating a pool of bitterness within him. But he was too proud to speak of Morice's debt to him. Morice himself finally confessed his dilemma. He had need of the money desperately. He would return it in monthly installments. He had suffered as much anguish as Gauguin. He promised to write the preface to the catalogue.

Now that he was not in pressing need of money, Gauguin's rancor against Morice disappeared. He was astonished at his own amiability. What a difference money made!

In this spirit of forget and forgive, Gauguin sent Mette two thousand francs. Perhaps he would have to send his sister half the inheritance. This time he received a letter from Mette. She had expected him to come immediately

to Copenhagen with half of the inheritance. She demanded it in the name of the children.

It was the letter of an irate mother, who saw her children growing to be a greater and greater expense to her. Aline needed party dresses. Emile needed money to go through the University. The occasional paintings that she sold, of her husband's, and her poorly paid translation jobs, barely covered the essentials. It was her husband's duty to sacrifice everything for the children. If there was any feeling in him, the children would come before his art. But Gauguin saw in this letter the final revelation of a wife that no longer loved her husband, who treated him only as a delinquent supporter of their children. The golden-haired Mette of old had become a growling watch-dog of her puppies. It didn't matter to her that he sweated blood to create one picture that she sold so easily. How could she understand the travail of an artist and the exhausting need in him for some sweetness and love to soften the pains of creation? He was a fool to believe that she could ever care for him again. The day he said, "From now on I will paint every day," her love for him froze in her heart. For Mette his art was the second woman in the triangle. He had deserted her. There was no forgiveness in her code of morals for desertion.

Nevertheless, she was his guiding star. All his success in art he hoped to lay at her feet. But now that the star was being shrouded in the cold mists of her prudery, he felt his ship entering a maelstrom. He did not know where to turn. He threw up his hands in despair and let fate take its course. With a cry of hurt pride he wrote:

"As I am forty-five years old and I have strong reason to know what is just or unjust, I find your advice a little

too much. Since, as you have recently said, I must solve my troubles alone, I will be careful so that I will never in the future be in the position I had been in Marseilles when I arrived."

Mette possessed his furniture and half of his pictures, which were certain to be sold sooner or later. If only she had come with the children to Paris to stand by his side for better or for worse, he would have given her everything. But since her attitude was purely mercenary he would retaliate the same way!

But the blow of a Mette forever alien to him was staggering. Still dimly hoping for reconciliation he had ended the letter:

"Let us always be good friends. It is much better to be frank."

But where would the maelstrom lead him? The exhibition would decide his future.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOUTH SEA BUBBLE

HE WAS gaily dressed for that memorable day in November — almost like a Russian nobleman. A long frock coat of light blue cloth, fitting close to the waist, and decorated with mother-of-pearl buttons. A waistcoat, also blue, with yellow and green collar, buttons down the side. Yellowish trousers. A grey felt hat with a bright blue ribbon. White gloves. A walking stick carved by himself with a pearl set in the top. Painted and carved clogs. He was determined to be as colorful as the paintings in his exhibition!

Everything was in order. The Durand Ruel gallery was transformed into a legendary Tahiti. The brilliant colors warmed the cold November air. The doors were open. The crowds came early — a sure sign that the news of Gauguin of the Polynesians had spread throughout artistic Paris. They arrived in anticipation of seeing something strange and weird. Even the catalogue was provocative with its mysterious heading — *Hina said to Tafatou*.

There were no exclamations: neither of delight nor condemnation. It was a bewildered public that tried to fathom the Tahitian words on each painting. Perhaps if they were informed about Polynesian mythology they might make some head or tail of it. At first they were afraid to confess their ignorance. What was it they saw — archæological il-

illustrations, the tropics, or a new art that went beyond symbolism? Was it beautiful? Was it instructive? Or was it funny?

A determined-looking Englishwoman with a mannish cut to her clothes cleared the atmosphere. She stared at the first painting, peered closely at the figure of a red dog, then, as if her intelligence were profoundly insulted, cried out loudly, so that all stared at her, "Red Dog!"

Without a second glance she turned her back and walked out of the gallery. The public breathed more easily. At last they could be certain. The exhibit was a joke.

Gauguin winced, but put on a more aggressive front.

As the day progressed, more subtle, more imaginative minds opened the door of the Durand-Ruel Gallery. It was gratifying for Gauguin to see so many celebrities of his day shake his hand as they would a friend. Their approval warmed him, made him radiant with a certain sense of having achieved the recognition that he struggled so many years to attain. It was the crest of the wave, and he circulated about the room in his Russian costume like a Grand Duke, receiving guests at a reception, dispensing grace by his very presence. He expanded under this feeling of *noblesse oblige*. This was the Paradise he craved. The great Gauguin, master artist of France — Gauguin, the aristocrat! If only he were living under the patronage of a King or a Pope, treated by them as an equal.

The bankers put on a protective air toward the artist, but they bought and sold works of art as so many stocks and bonds. Something of the divinity of an artist was lost in a commercial, democratic world. But he, who was a descendant of the Borgias, donned the regal air of the

Renaissance artist. Besides, he had a desperate need of it. The public was beginning to express its antagonism more openly.

He fought battles before every picture.

"I can understand Puvis de Chavannes but I cannot understand you," a bewildered lady confessed to him.

"Puvis explains his idea, it is true, but he does not paint it. He is a Greek, while I am a savage. Puvis will call a picture Purity, and in order to explain it he will paint a young virgin with a lily in her hand — a well-known symbol, so he is understood. If I wished to represent purity, I paint a landscape with limpid waters and without any taint of civilized man. But I don't expect civilized ladies to understand me."

But the critics were siding with the bewildered lady. What they could not understand they condemned. One of them wrote in his notebook:

"To amuse your children send them to Gauguin's exhibition. They will amuse themselves before the colored images representing the females of quadrumanes, stretched out on a billiard cloth, and over it all a shower of exotic words."

When a friend of Degas said contemptuously:

"Another one who would be original,"

Degas replied:

"Listen, do you know the fable of the dog and the wolf? The dog barks in fun, the men come running to see if the wolf is tearing him and his flock to pieces. They see no wolf. They come again and again to the call of the dog for help. They still see no wolf. When the wolf really comes and eats up all the flock they pay no attention to the dog barking. The public hears the bark of critics — they go

to exhibits and see nothing of consequence. This time the critics bark in earnest, Gauguin is the wolf, but the public thinks the exhibit a joke."

But Degas could not read the notes of another critic who was writing just then:

"He brought back from Tahiti some landscapes treated in an intentionally clumsy and almost wild fashion. Many of these works are made repulsive by their aspect of multi-colored, crude and barbarous imagery."

The bark of the critics had unanimously become a bark of derision.

But who were the critics in comparison to the master painter of his day — Degas? He was a man Gauguin could understand and love. Silk hat on his head, blue spectacles on his eyes, and the eternal umbrella under his arm (he had a horror of rain), he looked like a notary of the days of Louis Philippe. Hating all pretensions, he never dressed as the bourgeoisie expected him to dress. A good-natured bear, he hated to hurt other artists by his frank opinions and would always say: "Do excuse me, but I can't see very clearly, my eyes..." But for those who showed talent he always had an encouraging word. Ten years before he had said to Gauguin:

"You have your foot in the stirrup."

Gauguin's paintings were new, in fact too new, too revolutionary. Artists, who found a malicious pleasure in praising other revolutionary artists, flaunted their names before him, as if to overshadow him by greater names.

To the surprise of the malicious ones, Gauguin would agree with them.

"Yes, Cézanne is a devil of a painter. His whites are

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blue and his blues are white. He reminds me of Franck, constantly playing a great organ."

"Yes, beautiful colors exist behind the brown veil of Carrière."

"Yes, Renoir has a magic touch. He never knew how to design, and yet he designs well."

One hinted he was wasting his time as an artist.

"There is a suggestion of drama in your painting," he said. "You should be a dramatist. There is a wonderful opera to be made out of Tahiti."

"You ask me to exchange a great art for a smaller art. Painting is the greatest of all arts. It contains all the other arts in itself. The blending colors have the harmony of music in them. The ear is inferior to the eye. You have to hear one sound at a time and you become tired before the end. In painting you get all the music in one glimpse of the eye. In literature you are the slave to the thoughts of the author. In painting you can dream away with your own thoughts. In drama you have to exert your memory to appreciate the beginning, the climax and the end. In painting you get it all at one glance, provided you have the imagination."

He turned to Rousseau, who shook his head in congratulation. But Henri Julien Rousseau was the laughing-stock of the art world. A bespectacled, kindly faced man of fifty, in his shiny frock coat and spotted white gloves, he nosed about the exposition, oblivious of everyone, entranced. Ten years before he had given up his position as a custom-house clerk to become a painter and now, at the age of fifty, he was earning his living by teaching two octogenarians the art of painting. People were always scolding him for having given up his custom-house job to live the

miserable life of an artist. Even the youngsters to whom he taught violin hated him for inflicting an hour of torture a day on them. At the exhibition of the Independents no one had the heart to refuse his naïve paintings. But the gentle old man, oblivious of the condescension of others towards him, kept on painting and playing his violin, completely happy, but for the landlord to whom he had to pay rent, and an old widow, who continually rebuffed his advances towards marriage.

He was all on fire with Gauguin's paintings. He already saw himself painting the tropics with golden blacks, milky whites, fiery blues and orange burning into green. He said to Gauguin:

"If I could only paint like you; but I will do what I can with the tropics by visiting the Zoo, and the Botanical Gardens."

Gauguin smiled, never dreaming that, thirty years after, a naïve canvas of Rousseau would be worth a half million francs.

Strindberg, the white-haired Viking, blinked his eyes before the gaudy colors of a savage people so different from the hard-fisted world of the Norsemen. He was seeking new worlds to conquer, dabbling in alchemy, spending nights burning sulphur to break it up into carbon, announcing one day that a million francs had been offered him for his process of extracting iodine from benzine, and the next day begging the price of a meal from a friend. Dishevelled, threadbare and haunted by theosophy, thinking himself in the power of evil enemies, he found the repose and tranquillity of a tropic paradise incomprehensible to him.

Schuffenecker stroked his beard in puzzlement.

"But this is not Symbolism?"

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However, Mallarmé of the subtle eyes was heard to say the most comforting words Gauguin heard that day:

"It is extraordinary that one can express so much mystery with so much light."

But the praise of the few was of no avail to make the exhibition a success.

They could see in Gauguin's preference of savage to civilized life only a depravity of heart, rather than a definite defect in understanding.

Morice had written in the preface to the catalogue that his paintings were like an "ecstasy of joy," but even before the day was over the funereal pall of failure hung over the gallery. The words in the catalogue were only too grimly prophetic, "Man must die!"

They could not understand this man, who wanted to bring to the eyes of Paris an art that could stand side by side with the art of Asia, Africa and Europe, the art of Polynesia, the immense watery continent whose tiny isles had nourished such a strange and cultured people.

The dream of Gauguin remained a dream. These Parisians would never offer him a dome upon which he would decorate the world of the Polynesian tropics as Michelangelo had painted the myths of the Hebrews on the dome of St. Peter's. They were only interested in *cocottes*, the races at Longchamps, the cabarets, and the timid French pastorals, so belovedly painted by the traditional French artists. Only eleven of the forty-four canvases were sold. However, Degas, on leaving, shook him warmly by the hand.

"You have arrived — not with the public, but with yourself.

Gauguin did not answer. At the door he said:

"Monsieur Degas, you forgot your cane," as he handed

the delighted old master a cane he had carved and which had been hanging on one of the walls as an item of the exhibition.

Though the important men in the art world praised him, though Schuffenecker envied him, though de Monfried patted his back encouragingly, Gauguin would not go through another such day for any money. Despite his aloof manner, every derisory remark was a tongue of fire that burned the Indian at the stake. He felt so certain that the jaded Parisians would find his work a refreshing note in art: a strong primitive wind of beauty that would sweep them off their feet. Instead, the refreshing note was the comic novelty of a circus. Here you are, gentlemen, weird paintings of the South Seas by a genuine white savage—the biggest freak in Paris. Bring your children. See all the naked, brown denizens of the deeps of the jungle. See leaves as big as umbrellas. See red dogs, purple horses, and pink pigs. See cannibal heads on a platter. See idols as ugly as rhinoceroses.

Gauguin felt nauseated. He wanted to be left alone that night. Until early in the morning he sat on the side of his bed, stunned by the collapse of his iridescent South Sea Bubble.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAELSTROM

THE FAILURE of the exhibition swept Gauguin into a maelstrom. His inheritance was the stout ship that kept him above water even though his course was aimless. He relived now one of his own art-creations: a wood-carving of his Brittany period, one of a series of sea dramas, inspired by Poe, which he entitled "The Maelstrom." He might as well make himself ship-shape, put up a front to the world. Paris might laugh at Gauguin the savage, but the savage was in no way abashed. He would create a studio in Paris that would be a bit of Polynesia, a sanctuary where he could live in exotic bliss, a refuge from the torturing thoughts of Mette and the indifference of the public to his art.

At 6 rue Vercingetorix he recreated for himself a Tahitian haven reached through a courtyard with trees heavy with silence.

On a glass door he painted a *tane* and a *vahine* in embrace, with the printed legend *Te Faruru* — "Here one makes love." A small antechamber led from a room with a bed and a cosy fireplace into the large studio where the barbaric paintings of Gauguin blazed against a yellowish wall like old gold. Between the paintings were hung boom-crangs, hatchets, pikes, and spears of red, orange and black

wood that Gauguin had bought in Papeete. On a mantelpiece were amazingly colorful shells, corals and minerals brought from Mataiea.

It became the fashion in artistic circles to go on Saturday evenings to Gauguin's apartment. Not to theorize on art, for Gauguin was weary of explaining himself, but to hear the host strum the mandolin or guests improvise verses, tell stories, or play charades.

Gauguin's welcome was so cordial and his evenings were so informal that a few friends swelled into streams of visitors. The more the merrier, for the solitary soul found a strange relief in the laughing crowds around him. There was such a spirit of freedom, that even Rousseau would arrive to play his violin, whether invited to or not. But it was always amusing to see with what passion and with what little knowledge he played his instrument, or to hear him boast of his influence in the Salon.

There were evenings when the wine flowed more freely, when liqueurs brought quick forgetfulness and the legend on the door proved more than a legend. As if it were the natural order of events, a mulatto from Java installed herself at Gauguin's as the hostess to his gatherings. Smoking his long pipe, dressed in peculiar costumes, with his Javanese Eve beside him, a shivering monkey under the easels, Gauguin had the appearance of a mysterious Saturn transplanted from the Easter Isles, a mixture of a native and conquistador.

Morice suggested that they write a book on Tahiti together. A romantic story somewhat like Pierre Loti's, but going deeper into the Polynesian legends. Loti made a fortune out of his book. Perhaps *Noa Noa*, as the book was



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to be called, would be equally popular, and would help to explain his art to the public. It was a ray of hope.

Those who took advantage of his hospitality repaid him with flattery and made a demigod of him. Mette ought to know the value of the man she was neglecting.

"My exhibition has in reality not given that result which I hoped. But I must be righteous. I had put very high prices — in general as high as two and three thousand francs. At this art dealer, Durand Ruel's, I could not do anything else, as I had to consider Pissarro and Manet. Many have bid as high as fifteen hundred francs. It was not such a bad idea because the market price is now about one thousand francs. But the most important thing is that my exhibition has had a tremendous artistic success and even awakened rage and fury among the people who envied me. At this moment I am standing before the eyes of many people as the greatest of modern painters."

But those who had eyes to see, as did de Monfried, knew what a dolorous comedy Gauguin was playing. His studio was no refuge from the torments of his conscience. There was a night Juliette came, staring hostilely at Annah, the Javanese.

Suppose Mette arrived! Would she understand that he was playing a game in order to win buyers for his paintings? Strindberg would drop in to rail against women, who destroyed the souls of men to make them providers for the family.

Strindberg also had a wife and children who would have nothing to do with him. Both disguised their poignant desire for their children in decrying the institution of marriage. How he longed to see his family alone without the intrusion of his in-laws. An idea came to him.

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"Wouldn't it be possible when summer comes to rent a little peasant house on the coast of Norway, where I could work and you could come and join me with the children during every vacation?"

Christmas Eve was approaching, the birthday of Aline. He dared not send her any presents. Mette made it clear that the man who deserted his children had no right to bribe them with presents. She would speak no kind word for him. She would have them see her husband as he really was, selfish, irresponsible, and there would be no romantic illusions in their minds. But Aline smuggled through a letter to him.

To the clear eyes of his only daughter, he was the romantic unfortunate artist, who must wait for the day he sold his pictures before he could return to her.

How dismal seemed the Christmas celebration without Aline! After the holiday revellers had gone, leaving a floorful of cigarette stubs, a tableful of empty glasses and candles smouldering down to their last inch, Gauguin wrote to Aline in the early dawn of the 25th of December, 1893, to relieve his choking despair.

"My very dear Aline, how big you are! Sixteen years, but I thought it was seventeen. Weren't you born the 25th of December, 1876? You do not remember, and with good cause, but I see you very small, very still, you open your clear eyes. Thus you have remained, I think, always. Mademoiselle goes to the ball. Do you know how to dance well? I trust you do, and gracefully, and that the young men speak much about me, your father, because that, in a way, means courting you indirectly. Do you recall, three years ago, when you told me you would be my wife? I smile sometimes when I think of your naïve fancy. You have

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asked me if I have sold many pictures. Unfortunately no! but for that I would have much pleasure in sending you, to be placed under your Christmas tree, several nice things. My poor children, you must not think ill of your father, if there is not enough money in the house. Some day you will know what counts most in the world."

All because of money, money! Money that made people mean and petty and sour. It became a filthy lucre in his hands. He who had found it so difficult to get money, found himself so generous in giving it away. A hundred francs, here, two hundred francs there: how could he refuse to help a starving musician or an author who was destitute? His money disappeared through his hands with alarming rapidity. He did not even know how he stood with his inheritance. His lawyer was haggling back and forth with his sister and not a sign that Mette cared to rejoin him. Where was the maelstrom leading him to?

Seguin, the artist who had worked with him five years before, in Brittany, suggested that he spend the spring and summer months there. He could revisit the old familiar haunts, and he would not find his heart and his pocket touched by so many poverty-stricken hands.

With the gaudily dressed Annah on his left, and the monkey perched on his right shoulder, he made the tour of Brittany, a gayer and more distracted man than the sombre Gauguin who was drawn there years before by its sadness.

At the pension Gloanec in Pont Aven and at Pouldu he found many of the old group. But Serusier and Bernard and Filiger were less cordial to him. They scented in him a dangerous rival, who would take away all the glory of their work, if they confessed his leadership.

But in this maelstrom period, he was in no mood to

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take up the brush again or to argue on Symbolism. He preferred to spend his days fencing and boxing as if to relieve the brooding undertone of his mind in physical outbursts.

He was in such a spirit when he visited the ocean town of Concarneau to swim against the milling waves on the beach.

One day walking through the streets with Seguin, Annah and the monkey, a group of boys followed them, shouting obscene remarks. The boys found a rare treat in a white man dressed like a Russian, a negro woman in orange, and a monkey with a fez. Seguin caught one of the brats and boxed his ears. The bawling brought his father on the run, followed by several husky sailors itching for a fight.

Seguin, frightened by the mob racing toward him beligerently, ran down a side street and plunged into the river.

Gauguin raised his fists against the sailors who made a mad rush against him. His skill in boxing stood him in good stead, and the clumsy sailors were getting the worst of it, when one of them, sneaking behind him, aimed a terrific blow against Gauguin. The sailor's wooden clog smashed his ankle.

Gauguin collapsed and the gang disappeared. As he was stretched on a plank, his foot dangling loosely, he took out his pipe and tobacco and smoked away, his teeth almost breaking the pipe stem as he pressed down on it in his agony. Annah wept hysterically and the monkey shrieked in excitement as they followed Gauguin and a small crowd to the town hospital. Gauguin, alone, looked calm.

It was the calmness after the storm. In the bare hospital room, he took stock of his wreckage, physical, financial and spiritual. The doctor found the ankle so brutally smashed that it would take four months to heal. The sailor who

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had struck the blow was condemned to a year of prison. He owned a barge, but he had sold it before the trial and Gauguin could obtain no indemnity.

Annah left for Paris the evening of the fight, deserting him completely. A week later Gauguin heard she had returned to his studio and stripped it of his most valuable bric-à-brac.

Gauguin saw all the strength he had stored up in his two years of Tahiti and an outdoor summer in Brittany waste away as the weary weeks kept him on his hospital bed.

His pictures were not selling, the medical expenses were piling up, and his inheritance was half gone.

A letter from Schuffenecker was full of gloom and the hopelessness of being an artist. The future looked very dark.

One conclusion forced itself upon Gauguin. It was impossible for an original artist like himself to live in Europe. As he spent his convalescent days writing the romantic story of *Noa Noa*, his hopes turned once more to that tropical isle he had left. There he could end his days in peace and freedom without thought of tomorrow and the eternal irritation against the idiots in Europe.

The devil with his painting! He would not pick up a brush again, unless it was his pleasure to do so. Wood carving would be his serious work. Thank God, art was left to him, and yet it was this art that caused him to lose everything else, especially his family.

If only he could have Mette and the children with him in Tahiti! What a doting father he would make! How happy they would all be! If Mette sold the furniture, she would have enough money to establish herself comfortably on the Pacific isle. Tens of thousands of families at their age emigrated to America. Life in Europe was so difficult.

What could hold her in Copenhagen? Her family was a boorish lot. Translating was drudgery. What future could the children possibly have in Europe? What profit was there in being a family doctor prescribing the same medicines over and over? Or an engineer at a pitiful salary? The future belonged to commerce.

The South Seas were hardly tapped. The boys would be better off as traders, living a lusty, healthful life with a prospect of a fortune. In Europe their only future would be a degrading, petty middle-class existence: the certain result of European education that taught them only timidity and obedience.

Aline was far from robust. How strong and beautiful she would grow under the coco-palms. Those six sons of that millionaire widow, Mrs. Branders, would throw themselves at her feet. And Mette, herself, could spend most of the day reading, taking things easy, since there would be no real housekeeping. If only his wife could see what he saw in Tahiti. But she had never been there. No, it wasn't the romantic Garden of Eden he was writing about in *Noa Noa*. But it was preferable to a life of poverty in Europe.

The doctor found it impossible to heal the ankle perfectly. Gauguin would have to limp the rest of his life. Back in his studio in the Rue Vercingetorix, he forgot he was a cripple, as he nervously packed his bags for Copenhagen. For the last time he must plead with her. He could not live without her. He had written her a desperate, despairing letter.

"Now let us speak a little. I must confess that since my return to Paris any man in my place would have made some sad reflections on life, on families and everything else.

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"1. Letter from you: you must get out of your troubles alone.

"2. Letter from the children: nothing.

"3. My foot has been broken, my health destroyed: from my wife not a word.

"4. The winter has been terribly long and I have been alone, uselessly nursing my throat. I can only live with the sun. At forty-seven, it is no joke to fall into misery, and nevertheless, I am very near to it. I am down and not a soul to raise me up."

It was a sweet and resigned Gauguin who arrived at his in-laws in Copenhagen. Mette kissed him in a matter-of-fact way.

There was something tight and firm about her that disconcerted her husband. She had looked up at him with such deferential respect for so many years, and afterwards she had always a touch of pity for him. But this time all her tender sap seemed to have dried up in the bitterness of a deceived woman.

Haltingly, at first, but with increasing eloquence, Gauguin painted the picture of their future together in Tahiti. When he spoke of selling her furniture, she arose from the chair, with an outraged expression on her face. Her husband had gone completely mad. The preposterous idea of emigrating with the children ten thousand miles away to an island among naked, ignorant savages! Lunatic!

Her husband might be an artist with a certain following of eccentric intellectuals, but to her he had become a blundering, selfish man, heartlessly irresponsible to the children in his narrow obsession with painting pictures that were not even pretty. She left the room with the words she

had so often written him, but this time there was a bitter finality about them.

"You will have to get out of your troubles alone."

Gauguin had lost his family forever. He must exile himself to Tahiti alone.

He looked upon them with the eyes of a father who would never see them again. To his six-foot boy, Emile, he gave the portrait that Carrière had done of him a few months before. He felt a curious constraint with Aline. His feeling for her was too deep to express in banal words, while she, in the sudden maturity of sixteen years, lost herself in a worried revery broken now and then by a self-conscious smile. Absence had done its irreparable harm. The children called him father, but he felt absurdly remote from them. Pawns of an incomprehensible force, like ships at night, father and children could only look on sadly at each other as they drifted by never to see each other again.

There would be no children to weep at his death bed. Only words of glory that he would never hear.

Perhaps Mette was not entirely to blame for his exile from his family. After all, he was in no position to support them for more than a year in Europe. The blame lay with the director of the Beaux Arts, the institution itself that allowed original artists to starve. Gauguin vented his rage against the Beaux Arts and its director in a series of articles in *Le Soir*.

The stupid Beaux Arts that dared refuse a Pissarro and a Renoir to be sent to the exhibition of Berlin. The Beaux Arts that was the most beautiful institution of public uselessness!

And Monsieur Roujon who was shirking his duty in

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not trying to discover talent where it inevitably was — far away from the academy!

This passionate hymn of hate to the newspapers was of little relief to him. He was more successful with clay, twisting it into a thing of evil. "The ugly can be beautiful, the pretty — never," he had said and Oviri, the savage Diane, that emerged from the clay was surpassingly ugly and beautiful. A brutal head, wild red hair falling on her shoulders, her two heavy hands pressed against a baby wolf tearing at her breasts. At her feet a wolf. From the despair and horror of his mind was born a hideous woman — called by Mallarmé a cruel enigma, but only the symbol of a hard and cruel Mette. She for whom he had such tender affectionate thoughts, had spurned him. Love, clear-eyed and pure, had turned into an implacable Oviri. Was he a scoundrel, a deserter, fit only for the dregs of society? Were those who were outcasts of the respectable world, the only ones that could understand him? Walking alone, one night in the deserted Rue de Main, the beckoning face of a street-walker seemed the only sympathetic smile in a year.

In her tawdry bedroom he finished a bottle of absinthe and railed against a society that forced women into prostitution and geniuses into exile.

The sweep of the maelstrom that forced him into the arms of a prostitute as a haven for a lonely night only deepened his loathing for "this filthy Europe." It allowed its women to degrade themselves to depths no *vahine* would allow herself to reach. It had forced him into poverty, into desertion, into liquor. It had broken his foot, ridiculed his art, cheated him of his money, and, now, Civilization gave him, in the name of love, its ghastly gift — syphilis.

He made definite preparations to leave Europe forever.

His application for a post in Oceania was refused. The officials were suspicious of a man dressed as a hero in a comic operetta.

An art dealer offered him a small fixed price for every new painting he did with the understanding that he should have exclusive ownership of all Gauguin's work. He would never have to worry about money again. Secure in his tropic isle, he could paint to his heart's content.

Gauguin refused it contemptuously. He would never see himself a mere employee of a Jew. It meant the complete destruction of the hope that some day his canvases would earn him thousands of francs and would make him a rich man.

He felt the approving eye of Aline-Marie Chazal, his mother, upon him. When she had left Peru for Orleans to settle an inheritance of her father, her wealthy uncle, Don Pio de Tristan de Muscoso, died in her absence. In his will he had settled upon her an income of 25,000 francs a year, but the Peruvian family of the hundred-and-thirteen-year-old patriarch forced him to cross out that provision, during the delirium before his death.

His son, Etchenique, was in Paris the following year, and proposed an arrangement with Gauguin's mother. But Aline, the proud daughter of the woman who had written thirty romances, said:

"All or nothing."

It was nothing. Aline became poorer while Etchenique became the President of Peru. While the memory of his mother lasted with him, Gauguin would always say, "All or nothing."

However, he dared not leave for Tahiti without some reassurance, and what was left of his inheritance would

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barely keep him in Tahiti for more than a year or two. An art dealer, Levy, offered him a verbal promise.

"You can go down there quietly, and we will not let you get into any difficulties. Perhaps it will take time, for it is not easy to make people swallow your work, but I will do what is necessary. You may be sure that whatever happens you will always have the necessities of life."

In his eagerness to leave Europe, Gauguin allowed these words to stand for his future security.

The sale of his bazaar, as he called all the bric-à-brac of his studio, netted him several thousand francs. In the same auction sale of his paintings at the Hotel Drouot, February 18, 1895, Degas bought the "Woman with Mangoes" for 450 francs, while his *Manoa Toupapaou* (the Spirit of the Dead Awakes) reached the top price of nine hundred francs.

Gauguin had asked Strindberg for a preface to the catalogue of his auction sale. Strindberg replied:

"I cannot grasp your art and I cannot like it (I have no hold on it, for at present it is exclusively Tahitian). But I know that confession of mine will neither hurt nor surprise you, for you seem to be peculiarly fortified by your hatred of others; you are a man who takes pleasure in the antipathy you excite, so anxious are you to keep your personality untouched. It was of Puvis de Chavannes I thought last night when to the southern sounds of mandolin and guitar, I saw on the walls of your studio an uproar of sunlit pictures which pursued me in my sleep. I saw trees that no botanist could ever discover, animals Cuvier never dreamt of, and men that you alone could create. A sea that could flow from a volcano, a heaven in which no god could dwell. Sir, (said I in my dream) you have created a new heaven

and a new earth, but I find no pleasure in your creation; there is too much blaze of sun for me who love subdued light. And in your paradise dwells an Eve who does not conform to my ideal—for truly I also have an ideal of woman, or two!

"No, Gauguin is not of the stock of Chavannes, any more than that of Manet or Bastien-Lepage.

"What, then, is he? He is Gauguin, the wild man who hates a hampering civilization; he has something of the Titan, who, jealous of the Creator, knocks together a little creation of his own at odd times; a child who takes his playthings to pieces to make different ones out of them; a man who braves opinion, preferring to make out the sky is red instead of blue as the mass holds."

As a farewell gesture to Europe that refused to understand him, his reply to Strindberg included in the catalogue was his defense of primitivism. The Eve of his dreams no longer existed on the face of the earth. His ideal of woman remained only in his paintings.

"The Eve of your civilized conception makes you and makes us all misogynists. The Eve of old, she who terrifies you in my studio, might perhaps smile on you less bitterly some day. The world, which, perchance, neither a Cuvier nor a botanist could find, would be a Paradise I have been content to suggest. And it is a long way from the suggestion to the realization, of the dream. But what matter! To get a glimpse of happiness, is not that a foretaste of Nirvana? The Eve I have painted (and she alone), logically, may remain nude in our presence! Yours, in that condition, could not step forth save immodestly, and too fair (it may be) evoke pain and sorrow."

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Gauguin wanted to leave alone. He made arrangements to say farewell to his friends at a café.

The day of parting came, and with a pretended gayety he shook hands with the dozen friends who wished him Godspeed. As he walked away, they expected him to turn for a last farewell gesture. But Gauguin did not turn. There was nothing to tie him to Europe any longer. He had turned his back to it forever.

CHAPTER XXV

TOWARDS THE PIT

THE GAUGUIN who arrived in Papeete in August, 1895, was a rebellious Byron even unto the limping leg, shunning the face of mankind and with proud bitterness despising a world that he felt deliberately persecuted him. So intent was he on being absolutely independent that he went to a great expense in building his own house. Never again would he lodge under a stranger's roof.

He had it built in a deep shadow by the roadside, under a grove of casuarinas, in the valley of Pounouarou, deeper into Tahiti than his former abode in Mataiea. To his left was the mouth of the Pounouarou River. From his front porch he could see the sweep of white sand beach, the purple and gold crags of Moorea, with the explosion of the breakers, always in his ears. Through the windows of the back he could see a wonderful view of Mount Orahena. Railed in with bamboo, the roof thatched with cocoanut leaves; divided into two parts with his old studio curtains, a large window for a northern exposure, mats to roll down in case of rain, bits of Persian rug covering the floors, drawings and knick-knacks decorating the walls, Gauguin's home had all the odd comfort and beauty an artist could desire.

He even went to the expense of building a little shed for his horse and carriage. Now he could roll over Tahiti like a rich proprietor.

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Dressed in a *pareo*, as of old, or even wearing nothing, he did not need to flaunt eccentric costumes before the startled eyes of the merchants of Paris. He could be natural once again. He could have his affairs with the frolicking girls of the valley without the price of supporting them or the fear of procreating. He could paint whatever his fancy wished and carve away to his heart's content without one trembling eye on an easily insulted public and the other on the purse strings of a millionaire.

Tahiti took him back to her fold with all her heart those first few months. Girls trooped in at night — altogether natural maidens of the South Sea, quick to laughter and gayety. Tehura, who had married while he was in Paris, deserted her husband and lived with him a week. He made some stained-glass windows to give a cloistral effect to his dwelling. He would finish his life there in perfect quiet, *l'homme primitif suprême*, as Mallarmé called him.

Mette had shut the door of his family in his face. Let her get out of her own scrape, as far as he was concerned.

"Ah, yes, I am a great criminal. What does it matter?"

But the Gods who were intent on making a great artist of him would not let him rest in peace. The scabs of his broken ankle opened under the heat of the sun and the doctor could do nothing to heal them or to deaden the incessant pain. Spells of violent twitching kept him awake at night. The torment of his body drove him back to his painting.

"A nude queen is lying on a green rug, a servant is picking fruit, two old men near a large tree discuss the tree of knowledge. A sea coast in the rear. The trees are in blossom, a dog stands guard, two doves are cooing."

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With such idyllic, fanciful pictures he could try to forget his plagued body. He would drown in a sea of colors the drab grim thoughts that depressed him through wakeful nights.

But all the figures of Kanaka Gods that he chiseled out of cocoanut trees and all his paintings of the Elysian days of Tahiti could not scare away the *tupapaous* and the *tiis* that ranged over the desolate regions of his mind.

"The further I go the lower I descend."

What did all the labors of the thirteen years since he left the stock exchange lead to? Complete defeat. His paintings made people shriek. Perhaps he had no talent. He had been like a child, without foresight, with a naïve belief in the goodness of human nature. He had sunk all his money to establish himself, and even borrowed a thousand francs, so certain was he that the money due him from his auction sale would be sent to him! He was living on a hundred francs a month with the same old anxiety, awaiting checks enclosed in letters that never came.

The café proprietor that owed him 2,600 francs had gone broke after decamping with several Van Goghs, a Pissarro and a Millet that Gauguin had left in his charge. And Schuffenecker was always writing about "poor Madame Gauguin."

Yes, poor Madame Gauguin possessed his furniture worth 30,000 francs. He had sent her 4,000 francs in cash on various occasions. He had sent her half his canvases, from the sale of which he never received a centime. She was protected and petted. She was far from being penniless, while he had always lived like a tramp.

He would not be a fool any longer about her. He was sick of receiving her complaining letters. After all, his work

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was not finished and since he had to live, let it be with as much peace as possible. She would quickly sell the consignment of his paintings that Schuffenecker sent her and she would ask for more. It wasn't fair.

To de Monfried he wrote:

"Write my wife that I will send three canvases only on advance of 400 francs—one third of the sale price of my pictures."

To mock him the more, Schuffenecker, whose exhibition was a farce, envying the Gauguin who had fame, strength and health, plagued him with reproaches, from the security of his hundred-thousand-franc home.

"If you had been careful and far-seeing you would now be on easy street, and with a little more care and a little more kindness and friendliness towards your contemporaries, your life would be very happy."

He questioned his conscience. He had never been mean even to his enemies. At the most difficult times of his life he had more than shared with those who were unfortunate and his reward had been to be thrown over completely. He had saved Laval from suicide. He had given away more than half of what he possessed from his inheritance and he had left Paris with 4,300 francs of his own money in other people's hands. And there was not a letter from anyone. He had helped Bernard both with money and influence, and Bernard considered him his imitator. Suppose his words were sometimes sarcastic. He was not the type to flatter, to bend his back and to sneak about begging in the official salons.

"So many people are protected because their weakness is known, and they know how to ask. No one has ever helped me, for they thought me strong and I have been

too proud. Now I am cast down, feeble, half-exhausted by the merciless struggle, I kneel and lay aside all pride. I'm nothing but a failure."

And in his notebook to Aline he warned her:

"The one who is defiant suffers always from his defiance."

Even Levy, who had assured him that he need never worry about the necessities of life, deserted him.

If de Monfried could only find fifteen people, each to invest a mere 160 francs a year in him he would send them fifteen canvases a year and they could share in the profits.

"The devil! I am not greedy. To make two hundred francs a month (less than a laborer) at almost fifty years of age, and with a pretty fair reputation."

His ankle was one great wound. The unhealed foot was becoming unbearable. He could not afford any more morphine injections to ease the pain. Even the hospital in Papeete would not admit him for less than five francs a day, in a room with soldiers and derelicts, classified as peniless. However, thirty days of treatment at the hospital half cured his foot.

Chaudet sent Gauguin a few hundred francs of the thousands due him and he returned to his hut to paint *Nave Nave Mahana*—Delicious days!

He worked in nervous streaks whenever he could shake off his depression. With the little strength he regained he struggled with masses of clay.

"Sculpture is very easy if one thinks only of Nature; very difficult if one wishes to express oneself a bit mysteriously—in parables—to search for forms—what fashionable critics would call deforming."

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Pieces of sculpture were strewn on the grass. A lion with cubs and a nude of the *vahine* that was living with him. The *curé*, shocked to see one of his flock in absolute nakedness posing before Gauguin, had him arrested and brought before the judge of the district. The judge brought a verdict of not guilty. The *curé* bent his head in prayer while Gauguin sharply reminded him to spend more time with the sick and dying, and less with nude women.

Gauguin was able to send six pictures to de Monfried by the next boat. He warned his friend not to place them in an exhibition. He had too many enemies and an exhibit would wake them up and start them yelping. They would say Van Gogh and Cézanne were the real leaders and that Gauguin was only a pupil of Bernard and Serusier.

It would be best to leave a picture with a lover of art for six months or a year. By that time he would quietly grow to want it and he could then purchase at a reasonable price. No more vulgar publicity and exhibitions! He had no more thirst for glory or luxury. He just wanted the freedom to paint.

And in his notebook to Aline he wrote:

"I have known extreme poverty — I have suffered from hunger, cold and the rest. But that is nothing — one gets used to it, and with a little will-power one learns how to smile at it. What is really terrible, are the obstacles that beset intellectual growth. In Paris, especially, like in all great cities, the struggle for money takes three-quarters of your time and half your energy. It is true, however, that this suffering sharpens your wit. One needs a great deal of it, otherwise you would perish. With a vast supply of pride, I have come to develop energy and the will-to-conquer.

"Is pride a defect and should one develop it? I think

one should. It is the best thing in the world to fight against the human beast within."

As if sensing the fact that he was nearing the pit of the maelstrom, he did a self-portrait, the shoulders sagging, the face looking on the world with pity and sorrow. He presented it as a gift to the one friend he loved — de Monfried.

"I offer this last as a very slight token of my regard, of my friendship, in return for all your devotion."

In April, 1897, he received the most crushing blow of his life; Mette wrote him the short and terrible letter of the death of Aline. Pernicious pneumonia.

He took out the notebook to Aline that he had hoped to send her on her twentieth birthday. A few months more and how happy she would have been to receive it!

Instead he wrote with a trembling hand the last note to his "short notes without sequence, like dreams, like life — made all of fragments."

"I have just lost my daughter. I no longer love God.

"Like my mother she was called Aline.

"We all love in our own way; some love exalts even unto the sepulchre.

"Others . . . I do not know.

"And her sepulchre is there, with flowers? It is only an illusion.

"Her tomb is here, near me. My tears are her flowers; they are living things.

"Surely in the heavens I must have some enemy who will not give me even a few peaceful moments."

It was, in a way, a grim fortune that the following month was of such confusion he had no time to brood over a daughter who had vanished. The absurd portrait that

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Schuffenecker sent him by the boat which brought his wife's terrible note, showed him amid flames and a cross.

"Bah! There you have Symbolism," Gauguin wrote to de Monfried, but it was a symbolism only too cruelly true.

A few days later he learned that he had to remove his dwelling. The woman who owned his plot had died and the ground had been sold. The law required him to tear down the hut immediately. He had to sleep in the crowded shelter of a neighbor. The trials of Job had begun in earnest.

He who was living on bread and tea, who had so little money that he expected to starve, now, found himself without a roof over his head. It was the rainy season. He could not live under the coco-palms. Rainstorms fell at intervals during the whole day. He needed at least a thousand francs to buy a plot to build up his studio again. There were a million francs in the Bank of Tahiti. He must beg the thousand from them, even if he had to grovel before them. Otherwise complete ruin. He had to humble that terrible pride of his that had so boastfully said, "All or nothing," on one occasion in Paris.

The bank refused him the loan.

"But, Monsieur, do you realize what you are doing? Do you take pleasure in ruining people? I have a home and belongings. The loan will pay for a plot of ground and if I do not pay back within a year, the ground and the house is yours. You cannot lose."

The banker was adamant, adhering tenaciously to his policy of no security, no loan. Frantically, Gauguin pleaded with his few acquaintances in Papeete — a colonel, a lawyer, and a merchant. The men were touched to see this proud

and aloof rebel of an artist, stoop like any humble petitioner. They spoke with the banker, and Gauguin finally received the money, at 20 per cent discount, with the understanding that it was an exceptional favor.

Even with the money on hand, Gauguin had difficulty in buying a plot of ground. The natives held on to their land as they would to their life. They understood only too well that once their land was gone they would become mere wage slaves to plantation owners. Finally, he was able to purchase a plantation that was too large for him for 700 francs. However, it had about a hundred cocoanut trees on it which could bring him in several hundred francs a year.

Settled in his new studio and at work painting "The Dwelling Place of Souls," hope eternal brought him dreams of ease and security, once more. If a check came in from Chaudet, he could plant vanilla beans. A child could fertilize fifteen hundred flowers a day, taking the pollen from the anthers with a sharp stick and rubbing it over the stigma of the pistil.

The Tahitian sold his vanilla at a cheap price to the Chinaman storekeeper, but he would sell it direct to the merchant he knew in Papeete. He would then no longer need to rely on his agents in Paris for money.

The natives had no veneration for success. They were satisfied to live from hand to mouth, allowing the Chinaman to grow rich at their expense. But Gauguin hungered for the success that would liberate him from the anxiety of need. He could become the perfect savage only when assured of a steady income. But he was fated only to plunge deeper into the pit.

His agent in Paris had not written him in four months.

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He could not collect the money due Gauguin. The eczema which was chronic in his foot was becoming so acute that he had to remain in bed or rest on a chair. He had fits of dizziness — the hot flushes and shivers of fever. All he could afford to eat was rice and water. Most fruits were not yet in season and the man who preferred solitude found no kindly native bringing him fish or wild bananas.

His *vahine*, Paura a Tai, grew discouraged during the lean seasons of her *tane* and returned to her family, sadly disillusioned about her alliance with the man she thought was a wealthy Frenchman.

The wary Chinaman refused to give Gauguin any more credit for bread. The Chinaman had his store decorated with cheap prints from American magazines — earthquakes, floods, murder, fire and war to remind him that disaster was but around the corner, and that no one was to be trusted. The Chinaman never even walked without his umbrella, so fearful was he of sudden rains.

Only de Monfried wrote his monthly letter to him. Not even a line from Degas, to whom he had written so warmly the year before. But Degas was thinking of him, for he said to his art agent, Vollard, seeing a Gauguin,

“Poor Gauguin way off there on his island! I’ll wager he spends most of his time thinking of Rue Lafitte. I advised him to go to New Orleans, but he decided it was too civilized. He had to have people around him with flowers on their heads and rings in their noses before he could feel at home.”

Even Morice, realizing the desperate situation of his friend, had gone to see the Director of the Beaux Arts, demanding that he fulfill the promises of his predecessor

towards Gauguin. Monsieur Roujon bristled and clapped his two hands against the arms of his chair.

"Never, Monsieur, while I shall be here, never will Monsieur Gauguin get a purchase from the State. Not a square centimeter!"

Monsieur Roujon saw in a man like Paul Gauguin a power that could sweep away all the traditions that he held sacred. However, he could not let an artist starve to death. He turned to his secretary and ordered him to send two hundred francs to Gauguin.

"Don't forget to add, 'as a gift of encouragement'!"

The Gauguin who was living on rice and water returned the two hundred francs without comment.

He wrote to de Monfried:

"I ask friends to help me until I can get the money that is due me, but to get from the State has never been my intention. All my struggles to keep clean, the dignity I have forced myself to maintain all through my life, would lose their character on that day."

When de Monfried sent him a 200-franc donation from Count de Rochefoucault Gauguin took the pittance only on condition that the Count be given a painting.

August, September, October, 1897. Three months more and his sickness and hunger killed in him every inspiration to paint. If he could only exchange the tubes of paint for bread. But tubes of paint were of no use to anyone in Tahiti—but himself. And always the spectre of the bank loan. Even if a little money did come in, how could he ever free himself from the burden of debt? His property would be sold the following May and he would be destitute.

"I was wrong not to have died last year; that would have been better, and it would be idiotic now. Yet that is

what I shall do after the next mail, if I receive nothing."

De Monfried, who was struggling with poverty himself, was able to send Gauguin only a hundred and twenty-six francs. One could not sail a ship on a rag. His repeated vomiting of blood, caused by shock and worry to his heart, warned him that his ship was going on the rocks. He received a letter from Schuffenecker hoping that he was in good health and done with all financial worries. Morice sent him a copy of the *Revue Blanche* with the first installment of "Noa Noa." "Noa Noa" that spoke so glowingly of Tahiti! Tahiti that was dooming him to die!

Already a journalist wanted to write his obituary. He wanted information about the artist. In reply Gauguin wrote de Monfried:

"I want only silence, silence and again silence. Let me die quiet and forgotten, or, if I must live, let me live more quiet and forgotten still. What difference does it make whether I was the pupil of Bernard or Serusier? If I have done beautiful things nothing can tarnish them, and if I have done trash, why gild it and deceive people as to the quality of the goods?"

"At all events Society cannot reproach me with having taken much money from its pockets by means of lies. If I counted together those of my pictures which belong in one definite place, the number of canvases I have given away is greater than the number of canvases I have sold. Not that I regret it; on the contrary, if I had an income of only three thousand francs in Tahiti, I would give them all away. By this I only mean to say I have never exploited Society."

The mail-boats of November and December came and still brought no money for Gauguin. Only news from de

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Monfried that a friend, Meilheurait, would pay a thousand francs for a painting only if he absolutely needed the money. Did he not make it clear to de Monfried that he was starving? And what did his friend mean — “to hold on to the mainsail”?

“You tell me to keep my luff, but, as you know, one cannot keep one’s luff or even heave to without a bit of jib and trysail. I look in vain for that canvas in my locker and I do not find it.”

His *vahine* had come back and she was able to bring him mangoes and guavas that had just ripened, and fresh-water shrimps. The food improved his health, but of what use was health when there was nothing but disaster ahead? The mandolin which he played to console himself in the evenings now twanged harshly in his ears.

He had no wife and children. He only loved beauty, but if he could not longer find pleasure in beauty, if his heart was altogether empty, why continue to live? He had enough arsenic saved up. The arsenic that he had used to cure his eczema could be used to cure him of life. He wrote to his friend:

“If I should die suddenly I beg you to keep all my canvases that are in your possession, in memory of me.”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PIT

SINCE HE had no chance of dying a natural death, he would kill himself. He would meet death with his blunt, aggressive sea-wolf face, fearlessly. He had lived his fifty years as wisely as he could, and he was to die like a fool. And only one man to mourn his death, an old sailor like himself, painting away in Paris. What a strange destiny to die by his own hand, in the farthest corner of the living earth. How did it all come about?

A petted babyhood in Peru, a serene childhood in Orléans. Then the call of the sea and the lusty life of a sailor. The swing of a pendulum brought him to the confined, prosaic world of commerce and the middle-class respectability of a father of five children.

A call from the deep into the mysteries of art. The dark, obscure struggle to find his true self. Brittany, Martinique, Arles, and Brittany again. The sudden daring swing into the other end of the earth only to find himself back again in Paris, his father-heart yearning for his children.

But it was not for him to end his days in peace and tranquillity, painting masterpieces, surrounded by the bliss of a loving family. Instead, a victim of poverty, he returned to Tahiti, an old dog nursing his wounds, a frustrated country gentleman of France, making the best of it as a primi-

tive gentleman in a jungle. Nothing left to him but his art. Nothing left but to die, since his art would not let him live. Society would have nothing of genius and honesty. That was his major sin. He had ideals. He refused to play the game of trickery and compromise, and Society let him callously die of hunger. They who held the money-bags which society worshipped and obeyed, would force the husband to pay for his wife and children, whether he be poor or rich, would outlaw the artist who did not paint obvious pictures, would ostracize the man who did not believe in their God and country.

Compelled to look too deeply into life, he had to pay the price of disillusion and disbelief. The world saw no mystery in life. It accepted the commonplace and wanted to be left in phlegmatic comfort. He had been one of the tormented few who asked themselves where do we come from, what are we, where are we going?

Ah, yes, the priest could explain the mystery of ages in twenty minutes, the priest who had dared interfere in his private affairs. In retaliation, he had dared interfere in the private affairs of the priest.

Six months before, he had written a hundred-page pamphlet explaining certain matters to the reverend, asking him, who had never known the love of a woman and the joys and sorrows of fatherhood, exactly what he meant by "Love thy Neighbor." How few dared face the questions of religion honestly. There was the letter he wrote Morice a month before giving his opinion of Ernest Renan, who had written "The Life of Christ," as a man. If Renan had used his portrait of Christ as a rebel to attack the conventions of the Church he would have died a martyr. But



Renan preferred the worldly life, the pleasures of an honest citizen, and so evaded the question of the organized Church. Disbeliever that he was, too timid, himself, to be a rebel, he tacitly aided the cause of imposture.

No, the myths of the Church were no different from the idols of ancient Tahiti—images of words or stone created by the naïve fancy of man to shut out the immeasurable horror of the silent skies.

All the words of Buddha, of Greek philosophy, of Confucius and of the Gospel could not answer the questions—Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?

There was no answer. The sky was as blue as ever, the sun as hot, and life around him would not change with his going. No answer, only the eternal cycle of man, the child of nature. Nature germinating and efflorescent and then inevitable decay and death.

But his question would remain always in one great painting—a huge canvas—five yards long, two yards high.

He was the priest of the God of Painting, singing his last hymn knowing he was to be devoured by the implacable God he loved. For an entire month he worked in an insane frenzy. Nature: the bank of a river in the woods. In the background the ocean and the mountains of a neighboring isle—blue and green. A sleeping child at the left, an enormous robust figure in the flower of life picking fruit in the center, a resigned old woman at the right. The statue of a God between the man and the old woman representing the beyond—a statue made by the hand of man. Near the child, the happy mother and father, a third figure eating with them the food and friendship of daily life. Hovering

in the background two figures dressed in purple, perhaps meditating on the child's destiny. A crouching figure, hand upraised in astonishment at overhearing the spoken vision of the two in purple. The unconsciousness of youth — a young girl eating an apple — two playful cats beside her. A white goat. The old woman, the resignation of life's end; at her foot a stupid white bird holding a lizard in its claws, the strong eating the weak, the futility of words. Where do we come from — what are we — where are we going?

The picture itself could give him no answer. Perhaps when his heart would stop beating he would know.

The January boat, to the joy of Tahiti, had come in before Christmas. The coach never carried such a heavy mail. The Chinaman passed Gauguin's door. No mail for him.

He wrapped up the snow-white arsenic in a banana leaf. His *vahine* had left for the Christmas Eve Mass. The glorious hosannahs of Christmas carols spread through the darkness in a joyous rhythm. He put on his pair of Russian leather boots, laced like a clown's, that he had specially ordered in Paris for his swollen foot. He could not drag himself up the mountain to procure food, but he found the strength to limp his way up to die. He would die near the ant piles where his corpse would never be found to receive the pompous ceremony of the Church. He was not of those who live to have a fine funeral.

As he passed huts at the foot of the mountain, the natives wondered what the painter could be doing there so late at night. But they did not question him. He was a white man who preferred to be alone like Hina the Spider. Hina was the eighty-year-old Dutchman, who deserted from his

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ship when he was twenty, in the days of the first missionaries, and was now a rich misanthrope. If the *papaa* preferred to be eccentric, that was his affair.

Towards midnight Gauguin reached the higher parts of the mountains, where massive boulders and rocks were covered with moss and lichen. Lianas and goldgreen mosses hung about him like a shroud. At the base of the rocks the red ants had built their foot-high pyramids. He swallowed the leaf full of arsenic at one gulp and lay down to die.

At last the tropic jungle would claim one of its own, one who had foolishly spent his life in more barren lands and had now returned to die in his mother's arms. His body would rot into the earth and from its putrid mass luscious green plants would grow. Or the ants would nibble him up bit by bit and return with their spoil into their dank interiors.

It would not do to die with his face to the earth. He rolled over on his back to look up at the unearthly glamour of the moon. The thickly studded stars made luminous the sky — millions of whirling worlds like the earth on which a speck of life was soon to die. A phosphorescent light was all around him. It gleamed through the spider's webs, a man's height square, like so many silver sails in the pale void. To his dimming eyes they took on ghostlike shapes of mortals that he had known.

There was his mother, the proud, sweet face that he had kissed so long ago. There was the young Mette on their honeymoon, looking so adoringly upon him. Aline, the girl of sixteen, her deep, liquid eyes all compassion for her poor, tormented father. Plucky little Clovis, uncomplaining that

there was no cake with the tea. Vincent Van Gogh with his intense green eyes. De Monfried who would hear of his death, and weep. Strindberg—Tehura, Juliette, Lacascade, Degas,—phantoms all—each fulfilling a mysterious fate. Where do they come from? What are they? Where are they going?

He heard the violent beating of his heart and the peaceable gurgle of a mountain stream. Soon, soon he would know, or forever know nothing.

Suddenly a paroxysm of pain doubled him up like a tremendous electric shock. He rolled in agony and clutched fiercely at the ferns, uprooting the wild growth near him. A terrible vomiting pushed his stomach to his throat. A few moments of relief as he panted, prostrate, his distorted face against the dead, frozen moon.

If he could only die—that blessed realm of death more strange and wonderful than any South Sea isle. Another paroxysm of vomiting. He gripped the trunk of an ironwood tree from which he had chiseled so many beautiful, ugly Gods. Were they wreaking their vengeance on him?

Suddenly all his nerves quivered as if pulling him back to life. Overwhelming fear of death. Frantic desire to live. With a mad stagger he pushed his way through the tangled vines towards the sound of a brook that promised a refreshing draught for his dry, feverish body. Scratched and bleeding from the thorns, he fell like a log on the silvery gleaming water and drank till he could hold no more. He put his forefinger in his mouth to expel the remaining poison.

He repeated it over and over again until dawn. Haggard but still alive. The overdose had saved him. Slowly he made

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his way back to his home, trembling, nauseous, and fell on his sleeping mat as his *vahine* ran out shrieking, calling for help.

He had descended into the pit of the maelstrom but he was condemned to live.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONDEMNED TO LIVE

HIS BODY was one pulsating ache. Pressure at the temples, fits of dizziness, pain and nausea in the stomach, sting of his festering foot. He was so enfeebled he could not touch a paint brush. He stared at his large canvas by the hour. He had reached the zenith of his art. Never again would he be able to equal it. It was careless, rough, the arms were too long. Those who admired mathematical precision in art would consider it amateurish. But it had a mysterious quality of life. It arrested the eye. It drew one towards it. It would live long after he would have turned to dust. Out of the dolor of approaching death he had created an immortal bit of life.

But the artist of fifty with his masterpiece before him apathetically awaited the day when he would be evicted from his property and turned loose on the charity of a cold world. The February boat brought seven hundred francs from Chaudet, but it quickly went in paying pressing debts to the Chinaman, the doctor and the hospital. Since he was to live he would make every humiliating effort to save himself.

The old man who entered Papeete, his face thin and yellow, his hair streaked white, his foot wrapped in bandages, was a derelict of the South Seas. Seven years before

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he had stepped down the gangplank so eagerly, his imagination voluptuous with dreams of lotus land.

Seven years later he entered that same Papeete to sell his horse, and wagon, embittered, suspicious, a very martyr, condemned to live when he longed for death. Like the beaches surrounding Tahiti that changed from white coral to golden sand to black lava dust, so his first white illusions had faded to dark bitterness.

The Gauguin who had entertained celebrities in his Paris studio, who was such a startling figure in his costume of a Russian nobleman and whose "*Noa Noa*" was being seriously considered for an opera, was now forced to flatten himself before a government official, to say:

"I haven't a sou to buy bread. I must get a job or starve."

After several days' wait, a job was found for Gauguin to draw linear designs for the Office of Public Works. The great artist who had just completed "Where do we come from, What are we, Where are we going?" at last found himself of use to society by drawing mathematically correct lines. An artillery guard was his boss.

At the Cercle Bougainville they said:

"Know that crazy Gauguin who used to boast his pictures were masterpieces? Well, he got himself a six-franc job after all."

The crazy painter accepted his humiliation quietly. He could not obtain passage to France at the expense of the colony and he could expect no help from the Beaux Arts. He could never re-enter the brokerage game at his age. There were too many youngsters knocking to get in.

And a six-franc job in Paris was more difficult to find than in Papeete. Besides, a bottle of absinthe a day would

help him forget his degradation. On a night when he could not forget he wrote Morice:

"What crimes have I committed to merit such a fate? Spurned by the world, by my family. I have never read the words, 'dear father,' written by my children."

If he could save his property, perhaps all would not be lost. Trembling like a leaf, the day when the twelve hundred francs were due at the bank he begged the banker to allow him another few months. What was so momentous in Gauguin's mind was but the record of a white card among hundreds of others at the bank. No banker ought to be susceptible to a pleading voice. He allowed Gauguin another five months to pay his debt provided he deposited 400 francs security. Fortunately de Monfried and his wife, Annette, had sent him 575 francs the month previous. His poor, loyal friend had saved him from the rapacious hands of the bank.

Gauguin shipped his panoramic masterpiece to de Monfried. In the solitude of his cheap, little room he wrote him that only such men as Anatole France, Rodin, Renoir, Degas, the Count de la Rochefoucault, Mallarmé, and a few others were to receive private cards to allow them to see his greatest painting.

"Quietly, and only those who have the right," he demanded.

The humiliated artist had another secret satisfaction in a ridiculous scare, not long after, of the government officials. They received the news that a French officer had hoisted the tricolor in Fashoda, Southern Egypt. Surely a war between England and France would result!

A lookout man in the observatory near Papeete reported two British frigates. The guns from the French transport in

the harbor were transferred hastily to a hilltop of Papeete for a last desperate stand. All the valuables and papers were put in a strong box and the Governor and his functionaries rushed to a fort in the interior. By daybreak the strong-box had been buried under twenty feet of soil. The Governor remained in the fort, leaving his soldiers to defend Papeete. When the ships came nearer they were seen to be only French schooners. The Tahitians laughed heartily for many an evening over the episode, singing *himenees* in honor of the "brave" Governor.

It was sweet music to Paul Gauguin, a despised clerk far beneath the notice of his highest chief. He only regretted that it was not Lacascade who was the humiliated Governor, but his successor.

In August the boat brought in funds from Chaudet to pay the debt to the bank. His property was saved! He had to continue his job until more money came in. There were weeks he had to lay off work to treat his foot in the hospital. The arsenic had brought him additional pains in the stomach that never ceased.

There was a tender side to the fifty-year-old clerk that gained him a few friends. He would sneak time off from working on his linear designs, to draw pictures of queer distorted horses, idols and savages for his fellow-workers and even the head of his department. They passed them on to their own children, tolerating with an amused smile the harmless mania of the crack-brained old artist.

The drawings came to the attention of an old sailor who was now one of the wealthiest merchants in Papeete. He made the acquaintance of Gauguin, and over a glass of absinthe at the Cercle Bougainville confided to him his secret desire to found a weekly paper which would raise

Hell with the government, the clergy and his personal enemies. Now, if Gauguin did the caricatures and edited the journal, there would be a lot of fun and satisfaction.

The eyes of the apathetic artist brightened. The hatred within him that had smouldered down to the indifference of a clerk awoke once more in a blaze of bitterness. His petty job, which had been bearable with the daily support of a bottle of absinthe, now became a shameful and intolerable drudgery for a great artist. Recently he had written to de Monfried:

"And you, too, are not happy; what can you expect? For has it not been said that this is an inevitable law for all those who are superior in either heart or brain?"

But as a journalist he would chastise the mediocrities that were causing so much of his unhappiness: the officials and the rich who snubbed the impecunious clerk.

However, the wealthy merchant expected Gauguin to do his editing, gratis. Just as a lark! The project had to wait until Gauguin should receive enough money to return to his home. In the meantime he stored up more bitterness within himself as he saw wealthy Chinamen winning the favor of the prettiest girls in Papeete, with gifts of dresses and jewelry. He had to lower himself further, when there was no designing to be done, by becoming a foreman of road laborers.

He saw many proud officials ride by in fine carriages, officials who had treated him as an equal in the Cercle Bougainville and who now did not deign to notice him.

It was not until January, 1899, nine months after he got his job, that Vollard, an art dealer, bought nine of his canvases and he received from Chaudet and de Monfried eighteen hundred francs — enough to buy back his horse

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and wagon and ride to his home, once more the proprietor.

His studio during his absence had changed like himself — dilapidated, half-destroyed. Rats had eaten away the pandanus-leaf roofing of the house. The rains had ruined his mats and his rugs. A whole set of drawings that he could have used for future paintings were shredded by cockroaches. Even a large unfinished canvas proved a luscious morsel for the insects.

It required all his courage and all the money he had to mend everything, to buy mats, pareos and supplies to begin again the life of a country gentleman savage that he had forfeited almost a year ago.

His body was weak and his spirit had lost its zest. The nine wasted months weighed too heavily upon him. He felt exhausted. His sight grew worse each day. His eczema became complicated by erysipelas and a rupture of the little varicose veins. Lying in bed he tried to work in thought. His very imagination seemed crushed by the cruel reality of his poverty.

All his finest pictures, the cream of his imagination, had been bought by an art dealer at a ridiculous price. With complete control over the market of Gauguins and enough on hand to last him a year, that crocodile of an art dealer would offer him only half the price for his future work. Why paint when his pieces were fated to be sold for a crust of bread!

It was fortunate that de Monfried had sent him dahlia, nasturtium and sunflower seeds. If his imagination collapsed he could make flower studies. Something like the senile R don, eternally playing one note in his color studies. At least Mallarm , who had just died, a martyr to his art, would never know of his fiasco. All those whom he had so

wanted to please were dead or estranged from him. The path of art was like the red-hot stones with the little blue flames dancing over them.

Only those firewalkers of Tahiti who had faith were able to cross them unburned!

"I seem condemned to live when I have lost all moral reasons for living. There is no glory but that of one's own conscience. What does it matter whether the others recognize or acclaim it?" he wrote to his friend.

The sick, old Gauguin found himself a mark of indifference or contempt. His *vahine* had come back to him but with no love. He was not able to sleep. Every morning at two he heard the alarm clock that woke the Chinaman to bake his bread. Towards five o'clock he could hear the droning chant of the priests, imploring, in Latin, the help of Christ to conquer the passions of their bodies.

He tried so hard to fill the wakeful hours with visions of pictures. They were imitative of his older ones but he had to paint them. How else could he earn his living?

And then he had to paint them at one swoop, for he could not stay on his leg more than an hour. If only he did not need to worry about the expense of paints, he could use them thickly and so get a richer canvas. But the funds he had were always giving out and they were so slow coming in. His illness was growing more cruel and the hospital charges ate up the surplus he badly needed for paints and food.

The battle was becoming too much for him. The poison of doubt was added to that of bitterness. He, who had sacrificed so much for his art, was he on the right track? Perhaps he was making a tragic mistake and his work would never stand beside that of Van Gogh and Cézanne.

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He begged de Monfried for a frank opinion. De Monfried had certain doubts. The pictures did not appear to be altogether finished to him. Gauguin struck back at his friend desperately.

"So far I have put nothing on canvas but intention and promises.

"In our time there is just this great fault of treating all canvases as easel pieces. In this way, many, Gustave Moreau, for instance, try to excuse their lack of imagination or creative power by the finesse and perfection of their craftsmanship. Through excess of emphasis there is no promise. And does not promise evoke mystery, our nature not being attuned to the absolute? The salon has made the finished picture so fashionable that sometimes one is glad to find an unfinished masterpiece in a museum."

Then fearing to vex his friend who was "as good as good bread," he ended the letter:

"Your life is not rosy nor easy, and you certainly have no need of this extra work that I am giving you all the time and that I shall still need in the future. Forgive me for it, though you know there will be no recompense for it but that inner one — the knowledge of a good deed well done."

But his friend was the only one for whom he had a kind word. When Maurice Denis wrote him, asking him to exhibit in 1900 with the Symbolists and Pointillists, he refused with the sarcastic comment that he would not dare exhibit with so many of the masters he had so shamelessly copied.

The bitterness within him was swelling up a reservoir of poison. When would the dam burst?

"I am so poor I have nothing to put in my pot. If I ate the cock, he would be too tough. The hen, then? But in

that case I could no longer amuse myself watching my cock with the purple wings, the golden neck, and the black tail climb on top of my hen; the children would not laugh any longer. I am still hungry."

Two of the laughing children were his own healthy brats that flourished in a few rags cut from old clothes. They needed no meat to feel well-fed as did their father. They were almost white and resembled him.

"Anyhow, children do not bother me because I abandon them and I am a scoundrel of the worst sort who has deserted his wife and children."

A month later, when he returned from one of his numerous trips to the hospital, he found that his *vahine* had left, taking with her a coffee mill and a sack of copra. She had also taken the children. In his exasperated state of mind he lodged complaint against her as a thief and demanded that she pay fifteen francs' amend, or spend six days in jail. The attorney in charge of the district dismissed the complaint.

The amused indifference of the attorney rankled. He saw too clearly that he had become a ridiculous old fool, almost a beggar, without respect from the natives, looked down on by the officials. All the other great artists: Whistler, R  noir, C  zanne—almost any he could recall—were rich and honored, with friends who were intellectual equals. He alone was in constant misery. And his friends were such as the simple-minded planter, Monsieur Teissier, who dropped in with an egg nog or a rum punch or fussed about making an *omelette baveuse* in the provincial French manner. He could find no consolation living alone in an ivory tower.

His escapade in the mountain top had made him fearful

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of the hungry leer of death. It was in his blood to seize on life wherever it might be.

The merchant in Papeete who had wished Gauguin's aid to found a paper had just issued the first number of *The Wasps*. After all, Gauguin's father had been the political correspondent of *Le National*, a radical republican paper, during the monarchical days of Louis-Philippe.

With the columns of a newspaper open to Gauguin, the reservoir of bitterness within him, at last, burst its dam.

His first attack was against the attorney who failed to prosecute his *vahine*. He would show the stupid lawyer that he — the painter Gauguin — was not of the same class as the Chinese storekeeper whose chickens were stolen with impunity, nor the Chinese baker who received no compensation for the destruction of his vanilla crop.

"You have no power, Monsieur, you have only duties. . . . Knowing how to handle pen and sword, I intend to be respected even by a notary."

But the lawyer Gauguin wanted to send back to France to learn the A B C of his profession and whom he challenged to a duel kept a discreet silence.

Gauguin felt the victory his. He had not the energy to paint more than an hour but he could write articles by the dozens. His pen became so prolific that *The Wasps* was not sufficient to hold all his venom. With the aid of copying apparatus he bought in Papeete, he set up and printed his own paper: *Le Sourire (The Smile.)*

"As you see, it is the Smile, a wicked smile, that makes men, wicked men, grow pale."

Though it mostly passed from hand to hand, he earned fifty francs a month from its circulation. He couched his words to fit his audience and signed himself with an obscene

name. It was a vaudeville act for the imbibers of Papeete; an act of dirty jokes and slapstick remarks. But behind the vulgarity of its expression, Gauguin had the generous intention of chastising the strong and helping the weak.

Little did Gauguin suspect that "*Ubu Roi*," a grotesque and Rabelaisian farce he had seen in Paris, would inspire him in his journalistic technique, style and mood.

The Governor was the Emperor Gaspard, caricatured as mounted on a toy horse, his bulging paunch decorated with a scintillating medal, his hat shoved down over a bristling mustache, a *Marlborough s'en va t'en guerre*, followed by the Swiss Navy and the Protestant Army.

The pastors and priests who consumed half the crops of the natives in taxes, and who lived in the finest houses in Papeete, were not spared. Gauguin aired the rumors of the Protestants that the Pope ate babies and the priests had mistresses, while the Catholics could not understand how the Protestants could worship God, since the Good God was a Catholic himself.

Gauguin lectured them on good and evil. No one was good. No one was evil. Everyone was both. They were words that had a true meaning only when one applied them.

Even the pompous Colonel was thrown off his high horse—the Colonel who was the symbol of Imperialism. Gauguin compared the work of Colonization in Abyssinia between Arthur Rimbaud and Captain Marchand. Rimbaud had died the year before. Gauguin's article was a glorious tribute to his memory. Rimbaud was a poet, and therefore considered a useless creature. But by his courage and dignity he earned the respect and love of the natives and rulers of Abyssinia.

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He approached them alone, trading with them in a friendly spirit. In contrast to him, came Captain Marchand with guns and soldiers to subdue the natives. A Colonial administration set up by force in a small town cost France six hundred thousand francs a year. The natives were taxed thirty thousand francs more. The money was wasted in banqueting and orgies. Captain Marchand, representative of force, was hailed a hero in France. Rimbaud, representative of fair play, died in obscurity.

It was a compromise for the artist to have become a journalist. But better to make enemies than to have people indifferent to him. His solitude had driven him to the company of cheap petty officials and the narrowness of their minds had dwarfed his own. When de Monfried arranged a contract to have Vollard buy twenty-five Gauguins a year, on payment of three hundred and fifty francs a month, Gauguin accepted. He had refused a similar contract in Paris. But the "all or nothing" Gauguin of the Rue Vercingetorix never suspected that four years later he would write with satisfaction to his friend:

"I begin to raise my head in Tahiti and am feeling better as people learn to fear and respect me."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANTÆUS

THE MIRACLE of a new century seemed to bring with it the miracle of security to Gauguin. Because of the rising value of real estate in Tahiti, he found himself by October, 1900, the owner of a five-thousand-franc plantation. And he was assured of a three-hundred-and-fifty-franc monthly income from Paris. The grasshopper had scrambled out of the glass bottle and was free to sing more lustily. But the freedom had come too late. As if sensing the end, Gauguin wrote to de Monfried asking him to ship the ghoulish Oviri to be placed upon his tomb. He also gave all his wood carvings to the friend who had made his survival in Tahiti possible.

The news of Chaudet's death was a shock, for Chaudet still owed him two thousand francs and possessed some of his Van Goghs and Cézannes that were still unsold, but there was nothing to say, nothing to do. It was a clean loss but he was not the man to brood over his losses. The money would have helped him develop his plantation. He could have raised chickens, and planted vegetables and vanilla beans. However, there were plenty of tragedies greater than his own around him. An influenza epidemic was killing off the natives like flies. There was not an empty bed at the hospital. The guileless Tahitians, unable to stand the fever,

rushed to the cold streams and to their doom. Gauguin wrote a petition to the Minister of the colony for medical aid. He wrote de Monfried for supplies of quinine and for a medical book. He was a sick man himself, for his legs were becoming so swollen he was compelled to wear trousers to conceal their ugliness. But he made the rounds to sick-beds in the village doing what he could to comfort the dying Maoris. The fifty-two-year-old painter had learned the lesson that the greatest happiness was to be found in making others happy, but he overstepped himself. He was struck down himself with influenza and barely survived a six-week treatment in the hospital.

The scare of a bubonic plague in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco, manufactured by the politicians there to get some medical graft, had its effect on Tahiti. The ships were quarantined and as a consequence the cost of living tripled. The gloomy days were bright days for the priest and the pastor. They drew great numbers of terror-stricken natives into the folds of the church with the promise of Paradise. Gauguin was unable to get models. Civilization with its sense of sin and shame was spreading over Tahiti like a creeping paralysis. When Gauguin railed against it at the Cercle Bougainville, a trader agreed with him.

"Tahiti's becoming like a bloomin' Sunday school. There are girls by the dozen in the Marquesas that are yours for a stick of candy. With a sack of sweets you could be king over there as easy as Captain Cook with his sack of beads. They sure are crazy for candy."

The remark of the trader was like an explosive to Gauguin. King of a Savage Isle! Why was he wasting his time in Tahiti? His cheap journalism only bored the officials. Even his art-public must be yawning over his Tahitian types.

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"The world is so stupid that if one shows it canvases containing new and terrible elements, Tahiti will become comprehensible and charming. My Brittany pictures are now rose-water because of Tahiti. Tahiti will become eau de Cologne because of the Marquesas." And yet only a second-rate landscape of his Brittany period was offered to the world at the Paris exhibition of 1900 to represent the genius of Paul Gauguin!

His decision was made. He would die in the Marquesas. But he discovered he could not sell his property without the consent of his wife. That was the law. It was against all common sense and Gauguin stubbornly questioned until a lawyer found an old clause that eliminated the wife's claim after a month's registry of the sale in the mortgage bureau. Just another law, Gauguin thought, made expressly to cheat honest people. With the forty-five hundred francs from the sale of his property he bought a supply of lumber, a new house, and an organ to play on lonely nights. In the middle of August, 1901, he set sail for Hiva-Oa, named after Hiva the great—a cannibal chief on the Marquesas.

At the age of fifty-three he had embarked on his last venture. His body was decaying rapidly. He was living on a bare thread of energy. He needed the help of morphine to deaden the pain of his eczema, of his arsenic-poisoned stomach. His eyes were beginning to run and he had to stare for seconds at a time before he could fix an image.

He left Tahiti without a friend to regret him. The natives knew him to be good but they did not waste any sympathy on an old and sick man. The traders spoke of him as "coky Gauguin," the morphinomaniac, who had

painted a million pictures on any scrap he could get hold of and not worth the price of the scrap.

Gauguin sensed his loneliness. There were only two men he wrote to in Paris—Morice and de Monfried. As for the rum-sodden refugees, grafters and derelicts that comprised the white people of the South Seas, anything that he would say or anything that he would do would be like casting pearls before swine. He wanted to bury himself in the Marquesan jungles away from all officials with a few beautiful native women to glorify and paint, with his organ music to lift his soul above his rotted flesh. No one but he of all the degenerate whites in the South Seas still preserved the dream of the golden age. The white man, who called himself civilized, was submitting more and more to the predatory forces of war, to the organized acquisitiveness of private property. Gauguin wanted to be left alone among his kin-spirits, the simple child-like native who could laugh a hearty innocent laugh and weep with a broken heart not yet hardened to callousness.

His voyage to Tahiti was "a wild, but sorrowful and disastrous adventure," but surely the Marquesas would bring some sweetness to the last few years of a lonely man: surely it would be the promised land where there are more acres than one knows what to do with, plenty of food and game, and a gendarme as gentle as a merino sheep eager to welcome the immigrant and show him all the sights.

The first glimpse of the savage isle thrilled him with its savage beauty. Huge gorges, fantastic clouds, rain and vapor like dripping ghosts rising up and down the mountain-side. Chill breezes. Flocks of birds shutting out the sun. Blue-grey crags more fitted to the Arctic than to a South Sea isle. Towering rocky coasts exploding every twenty

seconds from the impact of the giant waves. Peaks like black pillars marching across the island. Forests blown to green waves by the mighty force of the trade wind. The valley of Atuana, cut in two by a river that leaped into waterfalls from the mountain top to the ocean. A sombre land soothing to a sombre pilgrim.

His lumber and his trunks were thrown on the beach. The first man to greet him was the *agent spécial*, a chief gendarme in a silver-striped blue suit and black boots, who was tax-collector, postmaster, and chief of police of Hiva-Oa. With a sinking heart Gauguin learned that the Catholic mission owned most of the land and that he would have to wait a month before the Bishop would return and decide whether to sell it to him or not. Gauguin would have to be checked up by St. Peter before he could enter his primitive heaven. He must play the hypocrite or return to Tahiti. The Gauguin who met Brother Michael at the mission house proclaimed himself a devout Catholic. Was he not a descendant of the Borgias, and was not a Borgia a Pope? He was brought up in a Jesuit school and knew all the rites of Catholicism. Brother Michael was impressed. The sisters in the nunnery and the brothers in the mission house rejoiced in their new settler, who would help them fight the Protestants. They sized him up as a very intelligent man, who spoke French perfectly, who had already learned many Marquesan words from a dictionary and whose gifts as a painter would make him popular with the natives and perhaps help to win more over to the Church.

The natives who had assembled at the arrival of the ship were all agog with the new settler. They stared quietly, silently at him. There was none of that laughter and gayety of the Tahitians when they greeted newcomers who stepped

off the gangplank. The faces of the Marquesans had a strange gloomy cast of thought. Many of them looked even more forbidding with blue strips of tattooing on their faces and legs. There were solitary damsels who were not even excited at the arrival of the ship. They perched on rocks along the beach, catching fish with nets from the outgoing waves and eating them raw. The houses along the main street were built on top of massive stone platforms—remains of a former glory. Many of the houses were dilapidated, on the verge of tumbling down. There were barely five hundred natives in the entire valley and only about ten white men. The Gauguin who wanted to be a king of a savage isle would have to compete with a pastor, a priest and a gendarme for that honor. The natives were unconcerned. Their main preoccupation was to get enough rum or cocoanut toddy to live peaceably in drunken forgetfulness.

Brother Michael made him realize how lucky he was in having the help of the Catholic mission. No money could induce the natives to work unless they needed money to buy new clothes for the Easter Day and the Bastille Day celebrations. Gauguin, who had arrived the middle of August, would have had to wait until the following Holy Week in April to get help from the natives. But the Bishop, with great exhortation, would find half a dozen volunteers. Gauguin took the hint. The native chief, who went to church in a full dress suit, displaying a heavy gold watch, was no more devout than the artist Gauguin. He beat his breast in *mea culpas* as Brother Michael ruthlessly denounced the pleasure of art and luxury, of gluttony, of adultery, the tingling pleasures of the seven deadly sins.

The newly erected statue of the Crucifixion, raised on

a platform twenty feet long; the figures of Christ, John and Mary in golden bronze; the cross painted white, was the *tiki* (a clay idol) that replaced the savage old idols of the Marquesans.

The Marquesan women who entered the church in long white dresses had found a new delight in the Virgin, Joseph, the Magi, the Shepherds and the Kings in their gaudy robes; in the cows and asses with red eyes and green tails, modeled in life-size behind the railing of the chapel.

Gauguin kneeled as a communicant at the rail accepting the host as the bell of the acolyte announced the mystery of transubstantiation. When the Bishop arrived the following month, Brother Michael spoke very highly of the descendant of the Borgias. The Bishop blessed Gauguin, sold him a half-acre of rocky land for seven hundred francs and promised a forgiveness of sin to the half dozen Marquesans who would help their new Catholic brother build his house. Gauguin soon found that rum proved more effective than the magic of the Bishop. With the promise of three bottles a day, the studio was completed in three weeks. It was built in the center of the village, so completely surrounded by trees that Gauguin might have been alone in a wilderness. And yet he had to walk only a hundred steps to a well-stocked store run by a young American. Civilization was not altogether useless.

His eight years of tropic life had taught him how to build the perfect studio. The house was constructed six feet above the ground on trunks of trees. It was built in the spacious proportion of forty-five feet by twenty feet. The verandah was reached by a wide stairway, behind which was the ground underneath the floor, ideal for doing

work in sculpture. Window glass between bamboo poles brought in northern light. There was a screened corner to sleep in, handy shelves, a hammock refreshed by an ocean breeze. He called it *La Maison Du Jouis*, and there were constant reminders that pleasure was the end of life in the painted panels on which were carved, "Be Amorous and You Will Be Happy—Be Mysterious, and You Will Be Happy." Between the panels was the organ. And over the organ was the framed photograph he constantly kept with him; the photograph of Mette and the five children.

A Chinese half-caste boy, Ka-Hui, was glad to make the fire with cocoanut husks, to knead the *popoi* in a wooden trough, and cook for Gauguin. Since chicken cost only sixty centimes and a forty-pound pig but seven francs, Ka-Hui was sure of living on the fat of the land. Most of the Marquesans lived only on the sweet potatoes they would dig up or the wild pumpkins hidden under thick tangles of vine. The shell-fish on the rocks could only be had at certain phases of the moon. The meagre diet forced them to keep themselves alive with drugs, such as *tikava* (a concentrated extract of tea), *popoi* (a fermented bread-fruit), cocoanut toddy or pills of opium from the Chinaman who was forever paying fines to the gendarme.

The seal of ownership was no sooner fixed on the deed to his property than Gauguin tore off his mask of hypocrisy with a violence that alarmed the Bishop. As a free citizen of France, Gauguin could now worship as he pleased. He built a kiosk a few steps from his house within which he moulded a clay idol—a Symbolic and grotesque figure, of huge skull and turgent lines, stylized to unbelievable immobility yet yearning to burst from its quietus.

The very first few days in Hiva-Oa had opened his

eyes to the degenerate state of the natives around him. Never before did he see so much sickness. Syphilis, elephantiasis, leprosy were as common as the coughs and colds of winter in a civilized city. The horrible cough of *poʻkoko* (a rapidly wasting consumption), was to be heard all day vying with the cowbells, and at night when the cowbells were still, the cough broke up the glorious silence of the valley. The natives' songs were mournful. They greeted each other with an indifferent *Kaoha* (love) as if resigned to their fate. Even the mongrel reddish dogs had in their eyes the eternal expression of the *ano-ano-uri*, the yearning sorrowful gaze of a dog watching his master at dinner. The valley that was known as the vale of fadeless flowers had become the valley of dying men.

So resigned were the Marquesans to death that the dying man prepared his own grave, sat in his own coffin and ate the poisonous Eva-apple, while the mourners assembled to yodel their song of farewell—*Kc-a-e-i-o-u*—waving to him as if he were borne over the sea in a canoe westward to the paradise of Havaiki.

Gauguin began to understand why they refused to work. Were not they all artists like himself, children of a leisure class that scorned the vulgarity of unskilled labor? No wonder they had an easy assumption of equality that irritated the gendarmes. With a deep pity for the dying race, he engraved on the base of the clay idol, the poem Morice had written in "*Noa Noa*."

*"The Gods are dead and Atuana dies of their death.
The sun which once inflamed the isles now sleeps
A sorrowful sleep, awakening with brief dreams.*

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*Now the shadow of regret presses the eyes of Eve
Who pensively smiles, gazing upon her breast
Sterile gold, sealed by some divine design."*

The valley of Atuana soon learned that the new white settler, the *ha'oe*, had quit the Catholic church and was kneeling before a clay idol in back of his house. He was one of their own. *Koké* they called him, for, like them, he took drugs to dream away his life.

"Poetry seems to come of itself without effort, and I need only let myself dream a little while painting to suggest it."

For a model Gauguin chose a beautiful Marquesan girl with dark reddish-brown hair, large shoulders and narrow hips, her unconstrained body undulating under a chemise of lace and muslin, her leg a straight line from hip to foot. Big round eyes, a fish's mouth and a row of teeth capable of opening a box of sardines. She had small bunches of herbs pinned to her dress—herbs of a thrilling odor. Her body was rubbed with the petals of flowers and around her hair was a wreath of pineapple eyes.

Bouguereau would have painted her as an angelic maiden with a lamb in her arms and Gérôme would have made her part of an historical scene greeting the new governor from France. Never did Gauguin feel more certain of himself. His painting of the Marquesan beauty against a background of trees would puzzle those who sought stories in paintings. It would be too distinguished for the crowd.

But what did it matter? The critics were bores, who wished to analyze his pleasures or who felt they should be allowed to enjoy them also. If he had been influenced by

them he would have clipped his wings and become a second-rate Denis or a R don. At least he had been true to himself. He had not followed any school. A history of art could not lightly dismiss him.

"If my work does not live, at least the memory of an artist will remain who freed painting from many of the academic shackles."

He had freed painting, but the girls of Hiva-Oa that he painted were shackled to the Priest and the gendarme. The women were always living under the shadow of fear. If a young girl wreathed flowers on her head, she was afraid his reverence might see her and fly into a rage. She was allowed to make wreaths and bouquets for the church, but it was sinful to adorn her own body. The sisters in black robes were the examples of beauty and purity for the Marquesan belles to follow.

The presence of Gauguin brought a new courage to the unhappy girls. They had no respect for the other white men of the valley. Peyral, the tailor, was fat and ludicrous in his spotted overalls and bare legs. His bloated face was covered with an untidy beard. Le Moine was a diminutive school-teacher whose long nose, red-pointed beard and mustache made him look like a boy with whiskers. Le Moine was proud of his academic painting and very angry at the new Frenchman who painted so barbarously and who took all his girls away. But the wealthy Frenchman who received money from Paris, who had a servant and who did as he pleased with no interference from the Priest or the gendarme was an undeniable attraction. The girls flocked to his studio, sure of a drink, delighted with the organ music, amazed at the Japanese prints, the photographs of pictures they had never heard of—pictures of Manet,

Chavannes, Degas, Rembrandt, Raphael, Michel Angelo.

The Bishop saw all his work of years ruined in a week. The nuns grew paler to see that the good Gauguin was but the devil in disguise, a sly devil, who had wormed his way into the colony and was corrupting the converts to a life of sin and frivolity. The Bishop felt it his duty to protest not to the gendarme, for the gendarme was an unholy man, but to that devil Gauguin. He entered the studio, lowering his eyes to avoid seeing the paintings of nude women hung about the wall, and pleaded with him not to corrupt the girls, but to paint the glories of nature as Le Moine did.

"Do you wish to condemn me to a vow of chastity? That's a little too much, Monsignor! I have traveled ten thousand miles to find a spot on earth where I can be free. Do not interfere with me or I warn you it will be the worse for you."

The Bishop preached a sermon the following Sunday urging the natives to avoid Gauguin, who was a danger to the God-fearing Community and who henceforth must be anathema.

In retaliation, Gauguin cut two pieces of rosewood and carved one into an image of the Bishop with horns of the devil on his head and the other into the image of a young Marquesan girl with significant flowers behind her ears. The girl he called Thérèse, and he placed her side by side with the Bishop. Gauguin had already heard the rumours of Thérèse, who did more than confess to the Bishop. Since the entire valley knew of the "celebrated love affair" they visited the studio of Gauguin to see it immortalized. They went out laughing. Even the school children saw them and laughed. Even the gendarme laughed, and Gauguin himself smiled as he wrote to de Monfried:

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“Our animal nature is not nearly so despicable as people would like us to believe. The mischievous Greeks, who understood all things, imagined Antæus, whose strength came back to him when he touched the earth, that is, our animal nature.”

CHAPTER XXIX

CYCLONE

BUT GAUGUIN was sinking into a strange depression. There was not a soul to talk to. Peyral was always drunk, trying to forget the days when he was prosperous and happy until galloping consumption took off his wife. His three white daughters, the oldest not more than ten, were praying for their father and counting their rosary beads in the Nunnery. Le Moine had the simple mind of a village school teacher; and proud of his own academic paintings, he found Gauguin's work incomprehensible.

As for the gendarme, the other day he had said to Gauguin: "Do you know Huysmans? It seems he is a great writer. He has just been decorated." Gauguin had already read the bit of news.

"Yes, but Huysmans has been decorated for his twenty years of service as a postal clerk."

The gendarme was delighted.

"Ah, that explains it."

And Gauguin thought bitterly that the real glory is to be known by the omnibus conductors.

Tioka was his neighbor and his only real friend. His leering face was tatooed in blue and his black whiskers extended from ear to ear.

Tioka had been a sorcerer, and for the gift of tobacco,

he placed a taboo on Gauguin's house, making it sacred to the natives and immune from theft. Once Gauguin asked the dozing old man whether he cared for human flesh. Tioka became wide awake, his eyes shone and he replied with infinite gentleness, "Oh! how good it is!"

The sorcerer would bring girls to La Maison de Jouis. They would fight with each other for Gauguin's favor, calling each other "rotten rats" and "piles of bread-fruit paste," but Tioka would calm them by starting them singing the *Raris* (mournful songs). There was one song that chilled Gauguin's blood—the song of the *Vahinehæ*-ghost girl. The *vahines* would begin with a shriek—"Who-A-Hee-Hoo"—and then with rapid pantomime and in a ghostly voice, they would chant in a breathless unison:

"A shriek! From that cave above—*Vahinehæ*. The trembling of the light—whose breath moves there? Is it on the roof—that scratching? Why does the child stand up? Awake? No, no, no! Something pulls it. Who screams? *Vahinehæ*!

"*Vahinehæ*! Hear—there—eyes! They jump from her head. Long red tongue! It licks the earth! Cold strong breath! It makes sick! Sharp strong hands! They snatch, they carry away! That howl—in the air—in the dark—*Vahinehæ*."

The shriek would keep him awake many a night until he heard the reassuring crow of the tabu cock ko-ko-ao, ko-ko-ao, around midnight. Or perhaps there were other ghosts than the *Vahinehæ* that were keeping him awake.

He had written de Monfried:

"And your wife is dying. It makes me think of mine who is not dying. I never have any news from her, and my children are forgetting me. Well, little by little, the

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wound is healing here in my solitude. And it hardly matters. After all, they could scarcely be very fond of a father who should be in jail."

The chronic eczema of his feet was becoming unbearable. He needed greater doses of morphine to deaden the pain. Perhaps it would be better if he returned to Europe, where he could get expert medical treatment. No one but his friends need know. He would bury himself in Spain and paint, in a new way, the bulls, the Spaniards with their hair plastered with lard. He decided to live on two hundred and fifty francs a month in Atuana and save the rest for the trip back to Europe.

"I am no longer the Gauguin of old. These last terrible years, and my health, which does not improve, have made me extremely impressionable. And in this state I seem to be without energy (and there is no one to comfort or console me). Only complete isolation."

There were days when the old sick man was panic-stricken. Was he to die in a deserted corner of the world alone and forgotten? Better to fight the enemies in France who delighted in stamping him underfoot than this terrible loneliness among degenerate whites and despairing natives.

Frantically he prepared an article for the *Mercure de France* to show the critics that a painter could stand alone with no need of the Academy or men of letters. For him at least the word liberty had been sacred. The article would prepare the critics for his return to Europe. He explained himself to de Monfried:

"You know what I have wanted to establish for so long a time. The right to dare everything, my own ability (and the pecuniary difficulties that were too great for such

a task), have not resulted in anything very great, but in spite of all that the machine is started. The public owes me nothing, for my work is only relatively good, but the painters of the day who are now profiting by this enfranchisement do owe me something."

Gérome, who had painted the Orient with an anecdotal slant, had a sumptuous studio and the respect of the art world. Surely he, who had brought a more mysterious note from beyond the seas, ought at least to receive the respect of his fellow artists. Perhaps before he died, he could sit once more at the Café du Panthéon surrounded and admired by the young artists.

The young painters, who had every opportunity of working and studying as he never had, owed him at least the purchase of his masterpiece.

His art agent had written him that he was preparing a comprehensive exhibition of his work. If he could only be in Paris and see it himself.

But suppose Vollard threw him over, sent him no more money. There would be no one in Atuana with whom he could find food or pity. To be secure in his Marquesan fortress he needed at least five thousand francs in reserve, so that in case of accident he could return to France. There at least he had a few friends who could shelter him. His longing to return to Europe seemed to influence all his new canvases. *Le Conte Barbare* brought back the face of De Haan, the Dutch painter who had helped make his Pouldu days so pleasant. There was a sunflower motive in two other paintings. Could it be the ghost of Van Gogh guiding his hand?

Gauguin was somewhat stunned by de Monfried's

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implacable reply to his letter that confessed his desire to leave for Spain.

"It is to be feared that your return would only derange the growing and slowly conceived ideas with which public opinion has surrounded you. Now you are that legendary artist, who, from the depths of Polynesia, sends forth his disconcerting and inimitable work—the definitive work of a man who had disappeared from the world. Your enemies (and you have many, as have all who trouble the mediocre) are now silent, do not dare to combat you, do not even think of it: for you are so far away! You must not return. You are as the great dead. You have passed into the history of art."

"You are as the great dead!"—Gauguin let the letter fall from his hand. It was more like a death sentence than words of flattery. A sentence to end his days in the valley of sleeping beauty, with nothing to look forward to but eternal sleep. He had wanted to be an artist at any price, but he never suspected the price would be this utter loneliness. He had prided himself on being a savage, but the mind of a savage was that of a child and could never satisfy the intellectual hunger within him.

He could plainly read between the lines of de Monfried's letter that his presence in France would paralyze the sale of his paintings. He had to pay the penalty for wishing to be mysterious—the penalty of isolation. The words that he had engraved on a panel had become a cruel boomerang—"Be mysterious and you will be happy."

The very elements in the sky seemed intent upon imprisoning him all the more in his studio. The temperature grew colder. The winds became stronger. Masses of black clouds gathered over the horizon. Sudden gusts of wind

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would blow out his lamp at night and whistled through the palm trees, pressing downward, causing the pandanus leaf roofs to collapse. The rain came down in showers, in a continuous downpour. The lightning struck down trees with each flash and the thunder loosened the pictures on the walls of his studio. Gauguin could hear the trees falling to the ground. There was a squealing of pigs and the squawk of chickens as they were blown down the valley towards the sea. Gauguin expected to be swept away any moment — no more, no less than the dogs who were flying through the air, their tails between their hind legs. Perhaps there was still time to write a few notes — the last scattered notes of a mind before the hour of extinction. He had nothing to fear. He could write what he pleased. It would be his own intimate journal that would no doubt be destroyed with him. He heard a crash. A verandah was torn from a house and smashed against a bread-fruit tree. He must waste no time. He must reveal himself as he really was to Mette, to the world, to his friends, to his enemies. He would leave nothing out. The sordid, the smutty and beautiful — just as it was in life. No romantic illusion about the South Sea Isles.

"It is rather treacherous for me to lure you on in the hope that you are going to get something quite different from what you get in Paris. But you must forgive me. I myself was taken in. Many things that are strange and picturesque existed here once, but there are no traces of them left today. Everything has vanished."

It was ridiculous to stand on dignity when the cyclone was trying its hardest to tear the house from the ground.

"Old Moa installed herself in my house and took off

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her chemise. Her skin is all wrinkled. She has been a mother eleven times. She lies down and offers what she has as if she were the most beautiful girl in the world. I have a headache. It is going to be measles. It is always measles when she comes. My chastity depends on it. Finally she came no more. When they ask her why, she says she cannot stand it, it is so fatiguing. Showing all her fingers, she says, 'Yes, like that every night.' That is the way bad reputations are made; make no mistake about it."

What could be said about life as a whole?

"We are what we have been from the beginning; and we are what we shall be always, ships tossed about by every wind. The few use their will, the rest resign themselves without a struggle. Everything is serious and ridiculous also. Some weep, others laugh. The castle, the cottage, the Cathedral, the brothel. What is one to do about it? Nothing. After all it's of no consequence. The earth still turns around, everyone defecates; only Zola bothers about it."

But life did matter. It was of consequence, for he was aiming to be known and understood and he revenged himself on his wife, on the Danes, on the academy, on all his enemies.

The third night the cyclone grew terrible. There was a peculiar sound, deafening and continuous. He forced the door open. Everything was pitch dark — only the immense pressure of the wind. As he stepped down to the verandah he found himself waist-deep in water. Quickly he went back to his room. In a little while his house would float away on the water to the sea. He would die as a sailor after all. Towards the morning the wind dropped perceptibly and the dawn rose with the fresh brilliance following a storm.

Luckily, Gauguin had had his house built two yards higher and twice as strong as was absolutely necessary. He alone in the valley of Atuana had escaped disaster.

The river had brought rocks and débris from the mountain-side and hurled them over the entire valley. The bridges and roads were gone. The bread-fruit trees were uprooted and cocoanut trees bent to the ground. Most of the houses were smashed and the grocery store was a pool of floating merchandise. The natives walked about in a daze, wearily removing the débris. The gendarme on horse-back was making his tour of inspection, promising government aid. The natives, knowing the gendarme, only shook their heads sadly. They knew that their only salvation lay in their bread-fruit pits, where the grated fruit had been stored during every fruit-gathering for just such an emergency.

Friends greeted each other warmly, like survivors of death, for the storm had left behind many corpses. Gauguin felt a sense of kinship as the natives greeted him with smiling faces — "*Koaho Kōkē* —"

Love! Gauguin! He was not alone in the world. The Marquesans loved the old sick artist. The land of his neighbor Tioka had been swept away, and the old fellow was in tears. Then and there Gauguin gave him half his land.

For the cynical artist had experienced a strange conversion — a shame for having wished to flee the beautiful valley of Atuana. The natives greeted him as a great white chief and they would be behind him if ever he fought with the gendarme. This was his own, his native land. Here he would live and here he would die.

"At my window, here at Atuana in the Marquesas,

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everything is growing dark. In a crescendo the wind rushes through the branches, the cyclone is in full swing. Jupiter sends us his thunderbolts; the Titans roll down rocks; the river overflows. Everything is in flight; rocks, trees, corpses carried down to the sea.

"The sun returns, the lofty cocoanut trees lift up their plumes again; man does likewise. The great anguish is over, joy has returned, the sea smiles like a child.

"The reality of yesterday becomes a fable and one forgets it."

With these words he ended his intimate journal. For the past did seem a dream to him, and all the bitter notes he had written during sleepless nights were no sooner penned than his madness of rancor disappeared and he was calm once more. If the world thought him heartless and cynical, it was his own fault, for he had allowed a terrible pride to obsess him throughout his life. But now that he had confessed everything, peace came to him.

He included with his journal all the articles that he had written, and sent them off to Fontainas, a critic whose influence might get them published. He was so determined on their publication that he wrote de Monfried to sell all the paintings of his first trip to Tahiti to pay the expenses of publication if that were necessary.

But with a sense of peace came a sudden sapping of energy. His eyes had become so bad he could see his painting but dimly. His two swollen feet throbbed and burned incessantly. He spent so much money in drugs and absinthe to deaden the pain that he found himself once more in debt. Vollard owed him fifteen hundred francs and had not sent him any money for three months. He had borrowed

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fourteen hundred from the Commercial Society. But he was not of those who resign themselves without a struggle.

“Spend yourself, spend yourself again! Run till you are out of breath and die madly! Prudence — how you bore me with your endless yawning.”

CHAPTER XXX

KING OF A SAVAGE ISLE

IT HAD been child's play for Gauguin to humble the dignity of the Bishop, for the "Katolika" mission had little influence in the Marquesas. The natives still placed a *Tiki* over their tombs as well as the cross. In this way they felt sure of appeasing both divinities. The taboos had still a stronger hold than the Bible. The women were afraid to eat squid, to smoke in their huts or carry the children pick-a-back. They were sure they would become lepers if they crept under chairs or lived in the many dilapidated houses of the dead.

It was not the Bishop; it was the *agent spécial*; the gendarme and his two assistants who prevented Gauguin from becoming King of the Valley of Atuana.

If only he were given the power he would bring time back from its flight and transform the apathetic natives into wild and lustful cannibals. Then again, there would be the blowing of a conch and the planting of bread-fruits at the hour of birth. And the child, if a boy, would be sure of an honorable career as a stonecutter, a woodcutter, a master of legends or a master of tattooing. And the land would be loaded with the fruit of Atea, as the chief from his high platform would watch his happy people dance off the heaviness inside their bodies. Boys and girls of adolescent years

would join the *kaioi*, their bodies stained with saffron and covered with a *pareo* of yellow cloth. They would circulate in groups about the valley, singing erotic songs, seeking amusements. But Gauguin, the high chief, would never let the girls swim off to the ships of white men. White men would become taboo, unapproachable. Rather the Priest, glaring fiercely, hands quivering, his voice squeaking for human sacrifices, than the benign Bishop. Rather have the tribe dancing nude around the corpse like so many furies cutting their flesh with shells till the blood trickled down to their feet, and all the while conchs blowing long, deep sepulchral tones, than the hollow and grave chanting at the white man's funeral.

Idle dreams! Fifty thousand Marquesans had died from bullets to defend their native land. Smallpox was brought by a Peruvian ship, leprosy from China; consumption from a whaling ship. The valley of Atuana was the valley of the shadow of death. The natives did not care how they lived, what they ate. If they had their *ti kava*, and the heavy feeling of a bellyfull of sour-tasting *popoi*, they were satisfied. Not a road had been built for years. The gendarmes stamped on their bare legs with their Garde Republicaine boots or used thumbscrews in vain. The natives would rather remain in prison. Why should they grow hay for the horse of the gendarme to make the horse strong, to carry the gendarme to find new prisoners to cut the bush and lay stones on the road when the coming of the rains would cause the bushes to grow again and the stones to fall? For what?

Why should they try to make money? When Tioka sold the copra from his plantation, he was fined two hundred dollars for being drunk in his own house. The last Governor had taken in nine hundred thousand francs in

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finer from the natives who persisted in making cocoanut toddy. Peyral, the white trader, had given up tempting them with money to husk his cocoanuts. He followed the way of the Marquesans and drank himself to oblivion under his cocoanut trees. And when Gauguin used his horse and wagon to cross the valley he almost broke his neck rolling over the stones that were waiting to be put in place on the road.

The old-time *kakata-kakata* laughter was heard no more. Nor was there good talk on the terraces at the time of fires at the setting of the sun. The only words were the words of lamentation. The gendarme sat on a chair while the proud Marquesan beauty must sit on the floor, her head without a wreath, her dress rotted with many holes. In the old days the words of the orators were beautiful, "sometimes like the winds, sometimes like the river jumping over stones, sometimes like the full sea. The play of their throats like the throats of birds, the play of their hands like fish in a pool, the play of their eyes like flashes of lightning. What man talks like a song today?"

There was fun to be had on the beach, a surf ride on the breakers, but only the children played at it when they could steal away from school. The mountains were full of wild bulls, wild goats, wild pigs, but only the officials had the rifles to shoot them. The Marquesan was left with empty hands to forget his sorrow in his drink, his drug or his luxurious nap.

And the gendarme kept on being the white-helmeted *Ubu-Roi* of the valley, levying taxes without rhyme or reason, prancing around to let the natives know he was ever in authority. He had left the delights of the Garde Republicaine in the civilized city of Paris to do his duty

as a King of a savage isle. And King he was with a vengeance. Did he not stop the singing of the *Protetane*, the Protestant natives, just to show he was the boss and not the Pastor?

When thirty natives invited him to a cocoanut toddy party, did he not have them all arrested and fined a hundred francs each — more money than the valley could yield in a year? The disaster of the cyclone had destroyed the bread-fruit trees. If they paid their fines how could they buy food? The gendarme didn't care.

When the gendarme frowned, the natives handed over the chickens, eggs, pigs, and the girls yielded their love for fear of court-proceedings.

The Marquesans were in his power, for drinking was prohibited, and since the natives had nothing else to amuse them, they were continually obliged to bribe the gendarme to allow them to drink.

And the natives always pleaded guilty in court. A plea of innocence would bring down the thumbscrew on them. The gendarme had a firm belief in a reign of terror, otherwise what chance did he have against five hundred "cannibals"? They would eat him alive if he relaxed. In his letters to France he complained of his hard lot. Gauguin knew his type well, for he wrote of Colonial officials:

"When the government pays the bills we like to gobble and grumble at the same time."

The Judge arrived but once in eighteen months. But he had already established a reputation for himself. Did he not deflower school girls who came to him to sign their graduation diplomas?

"There is so much prostitution that it does not exist."

The girl who complained to the Judge that twelve men

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had violated her, complained only because they did not pay her.

To whom could Gauguin appeal? He had written letters to the Judge, to the Governor, to the Colonial Inspectors — letters that remained unanswered.

The Judge had made it a rule to believe only what the gendarme said.

The Governor in the neighboring island of Nukehiva was grateful to the gendarme for sending him the prettiest girls of the valley to amuse his languishing hours of exile. "*La vie est triste, vive la bagatelle!*"

The Colonial Inspectors thought the South Sea Isles the best of all possible worlds since eighty thousand francs a year was extracted from them. Every crime committed was hushed up. The guilty man would threaten any indiscreet person with death — and that was the end. Gauguin had accused a murderer of a Marquesan girl, in a letter to the Judge. There was no reaction either from the Judge or the murderer.

"Is this human? Is this legal? Is this ethical?" he had cried in his letters, but they were words that had no meaning for *Ubu-Roi*.

If only the French newspapers could take up the cry of degeneracy in the Marquesas. In the meantime, he did what he could to save the natives from the hands of the police. When the gendarme fined several natives for not sending their children to the Catholic school, Gauguin informed them the Catholic school was not obligatory. Why should the natives be forced to take long canoe rides to bring food to the school children? Deprived of physical exercise, the children's feet were so tender from shoes they could no longer run over the rough paths or cross the torrents on

stones, their bodies so clad, they had become incapable of climbing cocoanut trees or mountains for wild bananas.

Besides, the long canoe ride was a mighty undertaking for the Marquesan whose sense of leisure was such that his minutes were marked off by cigarettes and the walk of a block was a walk of two cigarettes.

What was most enraging to Gauguin was to see with what pathetic eagerness they prepared for the Bastille Day celebration. For an entire month before July 14, they picked cotton, split cocoanuts, took any job to collect enough money to celebrate in tumultuous style the storming of the Bastille. They had only four hundred francs in their communal cash box. They had paid thirty thousand francs in fines since the previous holiday. The native idols which had been their reserve stock of treasure were all gone. The French government had confiscated them for the Universal Exhibition in Paris, 1900. When some German professors arrived the following year to buy the idols at any price there were few left. Now the only idol was to be found far from prying eyes, secretly worshipped by a few devout cannibals — the idol that Gauguin had sculptured for his friend Tioka.

Despite the little money they had, the Marquesans arrived in Hiva-Oa from all over the valley, dressed in new *pareos*, headed by a chief beating a tom-tom. There was a *maitre de danse* in a cast-off naval uniform. Drinking was allowed for the three-day celebration and the dances and the songs were prolonged through the nights lit up by bamboo torches. Even the aged found their creaking bones still pliant enough for a dance.

"See that old fellow Tini. He does a *hakā* (erotic dance) before old Apopo — that dry, old woman, that old grandmother, 'O beautiful young girl, I desire you!' He desires

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her! He desires her! O! O! O! She sticks a flower behind her ear! What laughing! What laughing!"

But the gendarme had his revenge for their gayety when he made them shout:

"Hurrah for the governor! Hurrah for the Republic!"

Gauguin bided his time to strike at the gendarme. He had refused to pay certain taxes on the ground that they were unjust. Sick as he was, he would have loved to have a boxing-match with that swashbuckler of a tyrant, but he had heard that the gendarme only boxed with his feet. At last he found the opportunity to accuse him directly.

Two American whalers had put in one day in a neighboring harbor. They had on board light flannel cloth subject to custom duties and the crew sold it directly to the natives in exchange for bananas, meat and the favours of the women.

The gendarme, for the price of a sporting gun and ammunition, shut his eyes and went up the hillside to shoot wild goats. Gauguin wrote to the administrator accusing the gendarme of neglecting his duty. At last the righteous citizen had the grafter in his clutches.

A week later, March 27, 1903, Gauguin received a sealed envelope. In elaborate legal phraseology, he was asked to appear in person before the Judge, for a trial on March 30. For the important occasion, Gauguin covered his legs with new bandages, put on a red *pareo*, and on his head a green *beret* with a silver ball dangling on one side. At a large table in the government house sat the Judge in his blue and gold uniform, his cavalry boots and spurs.

There was not even a trial. Shaking the letter before the astounded Gauguin, the Judge said:

"You accuse the chief gendarme of dishonesty. In the

Colonies the gendarme must always be right. On that depends law and order. You have been undermining his authority long enough. Under the code of July, 1881, for stirring rebellion among the natives, you are sentenced to a fine of one thousand francs, and to a prison sentence of three months."

Gauguin, who had expected to see the gendarme on trial, found himself, by a trick of legerdemain, accused and sentenced before he could collect his wits. When, at last, he did clench his fist and splutter:

"This is an outrage," the Judge waved him aside with the words, "You can appeal to Tahiti!"

Gauguin remained speechless before the brazen injustice of the impudent powers of the Marquesas. There was not even a semblance of trial. The disaster came upon him with such terrible swiftness that several days passed before he was able to write to his friends in Paris.

He had three pictures he could send to Paris. Perhaps de Monfried could borrow fifteen hundred francs on them. He would go to Tahiti. He would go to Paris. He would go to the very Minister of Colonies to get justice. He would raise a rumpus about the Marquesas. The people of Paris would sicken when they read his revelations. Many iniquities would be done away with. It would be worth while to suffer for such a cause.

He sent Morice a copy of the list of monstrous things that were happening around him — a copy of the same list he had previously sent the Inspector of the Colonies. He begged his friend to storm the newspapers with it, to get it in the hands of people of influence. No, he was not defeated yet.

"I am down, but not vanquished. Is the Indian van-

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quished who smiles at his torture? I am a savage and civilized people feel it to be so. All that is surprising and bewildering in my work is that 'savagery that comes up in spite of myself.' That is what makes my work inimitable. All that I learned from others has only hampered me. It is true I know very little. But I prefer that little which is my own. And who knows but that even this little when exploited by others may not become something great? How many centuries it takes to create even the appearance of movement."

But in a calmer mood, he wrote to his dearest friend, de Monfried, to whom he could bare the true state of his heart:

"I am the victim of a frightful trap. I shall have to go to Tahiti and appeal. The trip, the stay there and, above all, the expenses of a lawyer! How much will all this cost me? It will be my ruin and the complete destruction of my health.

"It will be said that all my life I have been fated to fall, only to pull myself up and to fall again: Each day some of my old strength forsakes me."

The boat had come in. No mail. No money. He added a few more words to de Monfried's letter before the boat sailed away:

"Here is the mail, and still nothing from you. For three mails Vollard has neither written nor sent me money. He is actually fifteen hundred francs in my debt, plus payment on the pictures I sent him. In this way, I now owe the Commercial Society fourteen hundred francs, just when I have to ask them for money to go to Tahiti.

"I fear that the society may refuse me and then I

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should be in a dreadful situation. If Vollard were dead or bankrupt I'm sure you would have told me of it."

His script was large for he was barely able to see what he was writing. At the bottom of the page he scribbled, "turn page." And underlining the phrase, he wrote on the last page:

"All these worries are killing me.

"P. GAUGUIN."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SMILE

ANGER BOILED within him. In his blind fury he wanted to take the first boat to Papeete. He took down his fencing swords from the wall, and thought to go direct to the gendarme with them. He wrote a furious letter to the Administrator threatening to expose him in all the papers of Paris. He sent his servant Ka-hui to investigate the frame of mind of the natives. Would they follow him and storm the government house as the Bastille was stormed? His brain was afire with one fantastic idea after another. It was the last flicker of a candle. Suddenly he collapsed. He could not stand on his feet. His head turned like a maelstrom.

He lay on his bed for days in a stupor. Ka-hui had to feed him *popoi* and chicken. His legs were fiery red, and burned like living flame. Needle after needle of morphine could not deaden the pain that was like the licking of a live flame.

One night he dreamt he was dead. He felt absolute immobility. A choir of voices were chanting a funeral dirge. He smelled the incense of death.

He was with Mette. She was reading a frightful tale of Poe. The house was chilly. She went down the cellar to bring up some coal. Her shovel struck a skull. Shriek-

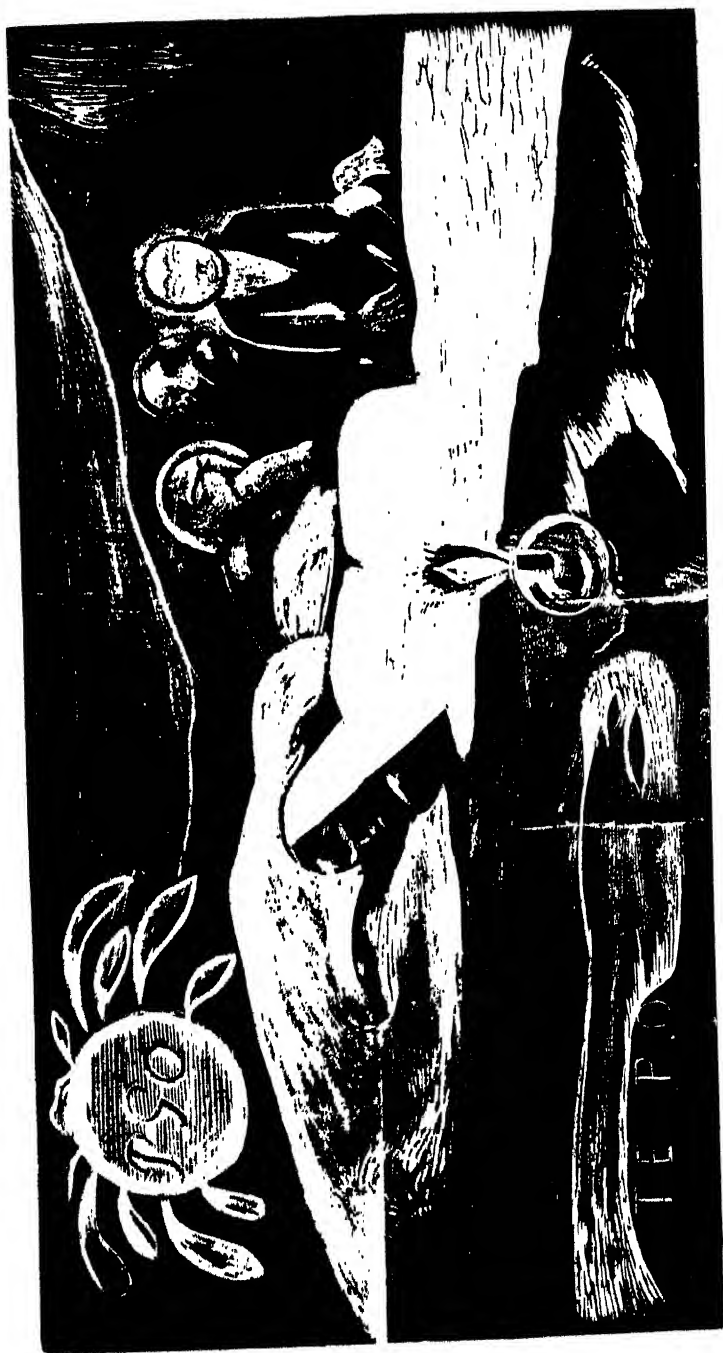
ing, she ran upstairs and fainted in his arms. He revived her. He went down the cellar to get the coal. Furiously he dug in with his shovel. Against the blackness of the coal lay exposed the lustrous white bones of a skeleton.

He could not use his eyes for more than a few minutes at a time. Then all turned black. He grasped his palette. It felt good in his hands. It brought peace and calm to him. After all, he never wanted happiness. What is happiness? Friendship, wealth, reputation, family life. He never really wanted them. He wanted beauty. The rare ecstasy of beauty. Warm, colorful, divine beauty. Beauty alone was good.

Mechanically he squeezed out colors from the tubes. He had done it so often, he could do it with eyes shut. He knew the color by the feel of the tube. He called to Ka-hui to put a canvas on his bed. Once more he was painting. It was soothing to paint. The mind was tormented no more. He drowned himself in the sensuousness of colour as a hot boy plunges in a cool pool.

He was painting houses. Houses in Brittany. There was snow on the houses. Deep tingling snow, two feet deep. How soft and white the snow! How gloriously pure! Mette was knitting as he painted. She was sitting in a black overcoat on a bench in the park. She wore mitts on her hands. The baby was asleep in the carriage, its little body warm under many white, woolen blankets. She smiled at him. He was happy with her smile. He barely felt the cold. He was so absorbed painting the snow.

Gauguin woke from his reverie. It was all so long ago — a year after they were married. He called to Ka-hui to get him the photograph on the organ. Before him was Mette and the children. There was a stab of pain in his heart. He threw away the photograph. Wave on wave of despair,



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of loneliness, of remorse overwhelmed him, crushed him. He wanted to weep. He could not. He called to Ka-hui for pencil and paper. With difficulty he scrawled:

"DEAR MONSIEUR VERNIER:

"Would it be troubling you too much to ask you to come to see me? My eyesight seems to be going and I cannot walk. I am very ill.

"P. G."

He handed the paper to Ka-hui.

"Take this to the Pastor."

With a scared face, the young boy ran to the Pastor's house, a half mile away.

He needed some one to talk to. Vernier was the Protestant missionary, but he had a past, a more human past — He was a student in Edinburgh University and at that time he could hold his own among the whisky-drinking Scots. What made him study theology?

The Pastor arrived ten minutes after. He sat down by the bedside — He was a man in his prime — six feet and strong. He had sat by the bedside of many natives, diseased and dying. He had almost acquired a professional tone with them.

"Your legs are very bad, Monsieur Gauguin. You need a nice coating of ammoniated mercury salve. Let me bandage them up for you."

"Thank you kindly. I always do it myself. But no medicine can help them now. I don't mind the pain. I am used to it. It's my inability to paint that hurts. Beauty is our only escape from life."

"Ah, yes, true! But beauty is only one of God's handi-works."

"Yes, everyone believes in God, but few feel him, and fewer feel beauty. Beauty belongs to the beginning of things. The Egyptian and the Assyrian art was more beautiful than the Greek. Some day critics^b will say of my art, Gauguin was the painter of the Garden of Eden. You see, my art goes further back than the Egyptian. But my art is misunderstood. Civilized people reason too much. They have lost the instincts of a savage. The Parisian cannot feel what I feel about the primitive. I am a genius, but a misunderstood genius is almost like a fool, isn't he?"

Monsieur Vernier was polite. He was before a different Gauguin from the cynical Antichrist of a month before. A pitiful Gauguin whose eyes begged for a little friendship. The Pastor cleared his throat.

"Ah, yes — the police seem to think so — at any rate!"

"The police! Yes! You fight the devils in the sky, I fight them on earth. If I had the strength and the money I would go back to Paris and save the Marquesas. All we need is a wise governor who would leave the natives alone and not take all their money from them. I have friends in Paris who are now working on it. They have influence. Something will be done."

"Let us pray that God will help."

"No, Monsieur Vernier, God can never help. If He could He would have helped long ago. We are all poor devils left on this cruel earth to find our own salvation. I am a lonely man. I have not even the consolation of God. But I have my art. Read these books by my friends, Dolent, Aurier there — on the shelf! There's another book — at the end! It is a poem that Mallarmé had given me — *L'Après Midi d'un Faune!* Read these books, Monsieur Vernier. They will help you understand the beautiful world of art. *Dites,*

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I will draw a sketch of Mallarmé for you — a sketch of a portrait I once did of him. He had a sweet face, a spiritual face — a true martyr!”

The Pastor handed him a paper and pencil. With a few strokes Gauguin sketched Mallarmé's face.

“There — To Monsieur Vernier — a piece of art.”

“Thank you! Thank you! Yes, I will read these books, but I must be going now. Duties! Duties!”

“Thank you for coming.”

“Not at all. I will be back!”

But the Pastor did not come back to comfort the sick man. Gauguin had been a nuisance for two years in the Atuana. Now that he was down he need not expect others to be kind to him. Besides, his ideas were too atheistical, too disturbing.

It was ten days later, on April 15th, that the Pastor met Tioka accidentally on the road.

“How is your friend getting on?”

Tioka shook his head sadly.

“Things are not well with the white. He is very sick.”

Both of them entered the studio of the sick man. Gauguin was still in bed, his lips shut tightly in a proud refusal to groan. But his chest heaved with sighs and he tossed about the bed.

“Is it very painful?” the Pastor asked.

Gauguin did not answer for a moment. He had given the Pastor three of his most precious books, and the Minister of God had not dropped in for ten days. But it was a comfort to hear the voice of a white man.

“It doesn't matter.”

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

Gauguin shook his head.

"No. Long ago I painted a yellow Christ. He was a sad, lean figure. Today, if I could I would paint a Christ climbing to Calvary, staggering under the cross, gritting his teeth, but smiling. The pride of being able to smile despite the pain is what makes us divine."

"You are a brave man, Monsieur Gauguin. I admire your courage."

"It is because I am a savage. You know the chief of Vaitahu? He asked Peyral for the right to adopt one of his daughters. Peyral has his three girls in the nunnery. The chief was willing to give that Peyral almost all his lands and five hundred piastres which he had saved. There is the sort of savage I admire. The white man loves his money too much. Perhaps the savagery in my paintings will never be understood by the white man."

"God will reward such devotion to art."

Gauguin kept quiet. He did not know which tormented him the more — the blazing red of his eczema or the pious sentiments of the theologian. No one seemed to understand him. It was the same in death as in life. The Pastor rose to go.

"If you need me, call for me."

Gauguin nodded. The Pastor left. Tioka the old cannibal remained to look at his dying friend with pitying, sorrowful eyes.

Three weeks later, the 8th of May, Tioka called the Pastor to rush to Koké.

Gauguin's body was twisted in a convulsive pain. The Pastor leaned over.

"How is it going, my good man?"

Gauguin gasped as he talked.

"It's not — going — soon enough for me — two fainting

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spells — can't see a damn thing. What is it, morning, evening, day or night?"

"It is Friday morning, the 8th of May."

"The 8th of May! It's all up with me. I don't know — why I'm so frightened. This is — the second time — but it's just as terrible. Ka-hui has — left me. It's no fun — hanging around the dying. I've been alone such a long time!"

"I'm sorry. I will stay with you. Be comforted."

"Remember Salambô — by Flaubert. She gives herself to the rebel — and then — betrays him. They torture him — He dies at her feet — But still he loves her, he loves her. Salambô is art. She has taken my heart and left me — to struggle alone. 'You will have to get out of your troubles alone.' And what troubles! I've had them all — I'm dying but I still adore her. Mad. Mad. But I adore her. Remember Poe. Nevermore, nevermore. Poe was a great poet. Nevermore!"

More words came out of him in a whisper. The Pastor could not hear. He sent out Tioka to dip a towel in the brook. Tioka came running back with the wet towel and the Pastor applied it gently on the forehead of the delirious man.

"Now — it will be easier. Feeling better?"

Gauguin muttered to himself.

Before the Pastor left, he said to Tioka:

"He will be asleep soon. When he awakes call me."

Gauguin was apparently sleeping. Tioka left to fetch Ka-hui, who was to be found in the pool swimming with the girls.

A violent pain sent Gauguin twitching on his bed again. He leaned over towards the shelf by the side of the bed where the medicines were kept. There was a large bottle

of laudanum. With a frantic effort he grasped the bottle and swallowed the narcotic. He put the empty bottle back on the shelf and reclined back on the pillows with a sigh of relief. His face relaxed into a smile. He was still.

An hour later, towards eleven, Ka-hui burst into the Pastor's house.

"Come, come, the white is dead."

The Pastor flew. Tioka was wailing, "*Mata, Mata, Mata,*" as he bit at Gauguin's scalp, the Marquesan's way of calling the dead to life. About the couch of the dead man sat the Catholic Bishop and two brothers of the Faith. Gauguin had one foot off the bed. The Pastor tried rhythmical moving of the tongue and artificial respiration. It was useless. The Pastor placed a sheet over him.

Tioka wailed:

"Now, there are no more men."

Natives gathered at the door crying:

"*Ua mate Koké, ua pete enata!*" (Gauguin is dead. We are lost.)

The Pastor turned indignantly towards the Bishop:

"It has been the wish of the dead man that he be buried with civil rites."

The Bishop bowed his head.

"We are praying for his soul. The body will be removed at two o'clock tomorrow morning."

The Pastor left with the words:

"I will be here at two when the body is removed."

But the Bishop had other thoughts in his mind. Gauguin was born a Catholic. He was a descendant of a Borgia. The devil got hold of him early. It was too bad he had not received the holy oils in his extremity, or absolution after confession. Ah, the devil is a roaring lion, always seeking

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to devour. Perhaps if mass were said for the dead, in the church, a guardian angel might intercede for him and save him. Who knows but that the sinner had asked for mercy a second before he died and God in His infinite Mercy may have forgiven him and saved him from purgatory? The Church must spare no effort to save him. The Bishop left with one of the brothers, the other remaining to pray.

Gauguin was smiling.

The shaggy Peyral reeled in. He removed the sheet and peered at the smiling face.

"He was a philosopher and now he is dead. Bah!" The correct little Le Moine entered with a solemn face and said to Peyral:

"The way that man painted — like a madman. It's too bad he had no talent."

Gauguin was smiling.

The gendarme stamped in.

"He got three months, but he escaped it, the lucky dog."

His eyes made a rapid survey of possible treasures to be sold — kitchen utensils, conserves, wines, albums, panels, paintings, canes. He peered closely at a painting on the easel — ("Houses in Brittany.") "Looks like Niagara Falls," he said. One cane had two figures at the top indecently embracing. He broke it in half.

"What a rotter! He leaves many debts and nothing here to pay for them. His paintings aren't worth a soul!"

Gauguin was smiling.

The American storekeeper pushed his way in through the crowd of natives and took a last look at the smiling face beneath the sheet.

"He was a brave one! The way he painted and jabbed in morphine, morning to night."

The storekeeper then looked significantly at the gendarme, and said:

"When he drank, he shared it, and he paid his women. That's more than we can boast of."

The Pastor, who had told his servant to wake him at two, arrived at the studio to find the body gone. It had been removed to the Catholic Church by the Bishop and his brothers of the faith shortly after midnight. The corpse was lying between rows of candles as the solemn mass was intoned over the smiling face. Followed by a few natives, Tioka and the Catholics, Peyral and Le Moine, the coffin was carried through the cocoanut orchard leading up to the cemetery on top of a hill. The path was called the Road to Calvary and at the top was a cross forty feet high with a Christ nailed upon it all snow-white against the luminous blue of the starry, tropic sky.

There was only a wooden cross to mark the grave, but the Bishop who had prayed long and earnestly, was pleased that the soul was on its aerial voyage to Paradise. For was not Gauguin smiling in his coffin?

It was a strange smile.

Who knows, but that once Gauguin passed the portals of death, where neither time nor space exists, he heard the words of Mette, spoken many years later towards the end of her life to her children — words that could explain that strange smile of his — of scorn, of pity, of peace —

"I, I know nothing of art, and I could not very well understand the ways of your father. But he was so intelligent I do not believe he was capable of doing anything wicked."

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